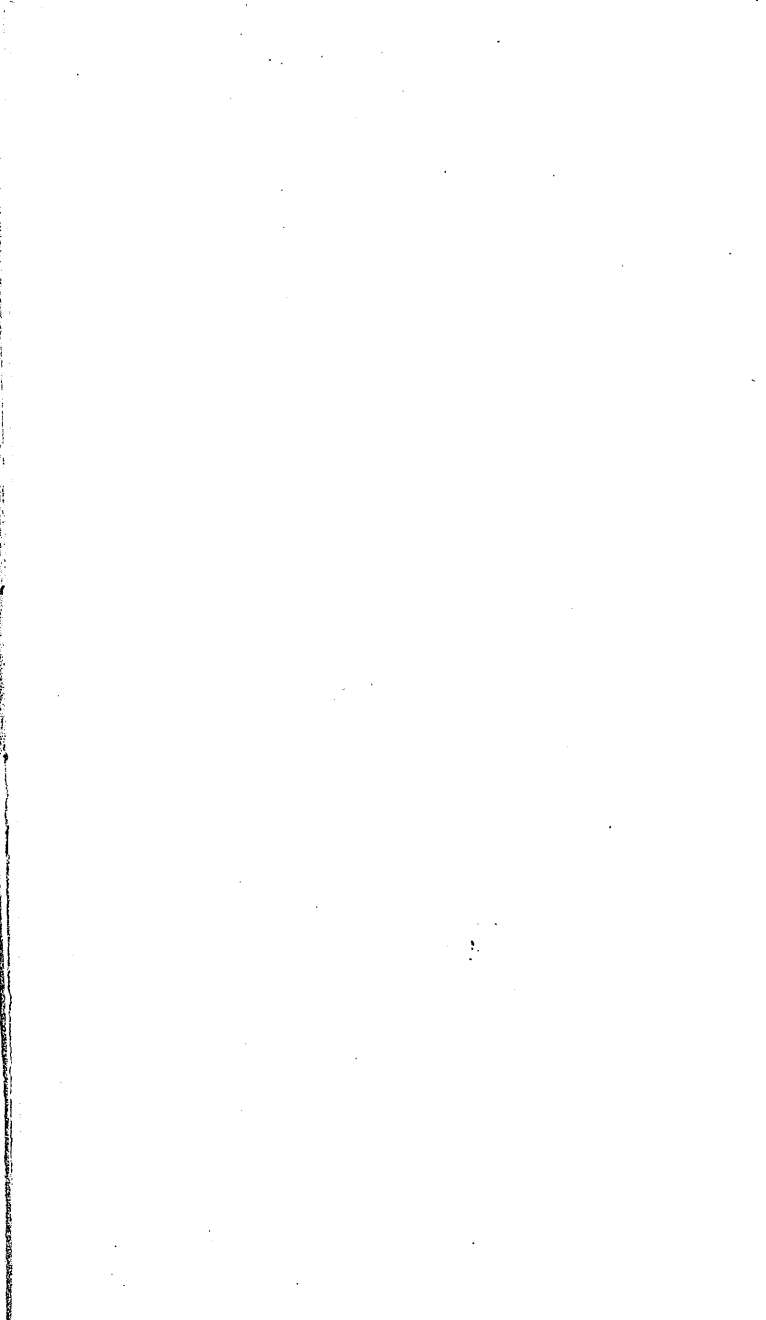


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PRAYER

“ More things are wrought by prayer,
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friends.
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.”

—*Tennyson.*

THE
PRAYER
OF
CHICAGO LIBRARY
Practical Treatise

BY THE
REV. A. F. DOUGLAS
" "
ANCROFT, NORHAM
AUTHOR OF "THE PASTOR AND HIS PEOPLE," ETC.

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OLIPHANT ANDERSON & FERRIER

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Inscribed

WITH EVERY SENTIMENT OF RESPECT AND ESTEEM
TO THE
RIGHT HON. GEORGIANA, COUNTESS OF SEAFIELD,
IN APPRECIATION OF HER CHRISTIAN CHARACTER
AND HELPFULNESS IN EVERY
GOOD WORK.

57500

“‘All things come to him who waits,’ and it generally comes true to those whose waiting is a prayerful one, as Alfred Tennyson’s was. For he was pre-eminently a man of prayer, and as he told me shortly before his death, never had one earnest prayer of his failed to receive an answer. And so, at last, to use his own words, the peace of God came into his life before the altar to which he had led my Aunt Emily as his bride.”—*Tennyson*, by AGNES GRACE, Weld, *Contemporary Review*, Nov. 1899.

PREFACE

Is there any subject more interesting to the Christian than Prayer? Is there any subject on which he reflects more, and concerning which he more ardently craves instruction and help? The man who is altogether an alien from the faith of Christ does not believe that anything is ever accomplished by knocking at God's door; and yet even he, when trouble comes upon him, will be found trying the expedient of prayer to deliver him out of his difficulties. Before this he explained all the answers to prayer which he heard of as mere coincidences, but now in the day of his distress he thinks there may be something in it; he ventures to think that perhaps there may be a God who hears prayer, and he will make the experiment at least. The merely nominal Christian again prays sometimes, but he expects to gain nothing by it. However much he may believe that prayer is sometimes heard, he for himself laughs at the idea that it will in the least help him, and thus he never really prays. And alas! what unbelief in this direction is to be found among God's own children. How much prayer is offered up which

is followed by no expectation of blessing. It is, alas ! often with them a mere religious act performed to satisfy conscience.

That this is the state of mind among multitudes every one will confess. It is this citadel of unbelief we would fain assail. We would fain in the following pages persuade the unbeliever or the half-hearted believer to reason with us on this great theme. We would fain persuade our reader that in this precious privilege of prayer we have offered to us not only one of the choicest of God's gifts, but one which is of every-day use, and which meets every-day needs. We would fain convince the sceptical of the reality of this intercourse between heaven and earth. We would fain persuade every one who will listen to us that no time can be so profitably employed as that which is spent upon our knees ; that no sowing brings so rich a harvest as this casting of prayer-seed in the soil of God ; and that so far from being mystical, shadowy, something that belongs not to every-day life, pertaining only, if anywhere, to the invisible world or the world to come, it is a weapon which "answereth all things"—a weapon more powerful than money, more powerful than brute force, more powerful than human strength or human skill.

For this end we propose to write plainly. We will indulge in no rhetoric. We will endeavour

to set forth as simply as we can truths which are founded on the promises of God, and which human experience have tried and tested. We will travel over no region which has not been often explored, we will make no assertion which has not been often verified. Only the convictions of our inmost soul, only convictions tested by a long life's experience, will find expression in our efforts to help the reader. We do not propose to preach or to sermonise. That method has its own advantages and also its own limitations. With the printed page before him, the reader can pause and reflect. And we propose to deal with the reader after the fashion of an earnest fireside conversation on a topic of supreme interest and importance, hoping thereby to dispel unbelief, and to increase faith, and to set him on the work which faith in God as the hearer of prayer will of necessity encourage.

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"I was never deeply interested in any object, I never prayed sincerely for anything, but it came, at some time ; no matter how distant a day, somehow in some shape, probably the last I should have devised, it came." — ADONIRAM JUDSON.

I

EXHORTATIONS TO PRAYER

WE are all familiar with exhortations to prayer addressed from the pulpit and elsewhere. To young and old it is often said, pray, pray more, pray oftener, pray more fervently; and the exhortation is perfectly correct, proper, and one that cannot strictly be found fault with. And yet it at least needs explanation. The devout Roman Catholic prays, prays much. With his eyes on his prayer book and his beads in his hand, he spends sometimes hours in the performance of his task. And he has an end to gain by it; he is buying the favour of God, or the Virgin, or his patron saint. The more prayers he can say the more he thinks he commends himself to his heavenly patron. It is a "good work," the mere act of praying, which will be set to his account in heaven's chancery. The theological phrase, *opus operatum*, covers the meaning of this act.

Even so we fear many pray with something of the same feeling, that they are performing an act which is pleasing to God and is a pathway to His favour; and the exhortation

to pray as it is often given has a tendency to create the same feeling. Now the mere utterance of pious words, whether they are read or spoken, is not prayer, however dutifully and at proper times engaged in. This is to make the means the end. For prayer is only a means, a devout and appointed means, of giving expression before God and to God of the desires of the heart. Unless it is this it is nothing better than the prayer-wheel of the Bhuddist.

Here is a simple illustration of what we mean. A pastor in one of his rounds entered an open cottage door. He was welcomed within, and after a pleasant conversation he rose to depart. "Surely," said the good woman, "you will not go away without giving us a prayer." "Certainly," said the pastor, "I shall be delighted to pray with you, but you must tell me first what you want, and I will ask it." This new way of teaching puzzled her exceedingly. She never thought of prayer in that light. She was unable to say what she wanted; or perhaps she could have told of many things she wanted, but then it never dawned upon her that any of them could be gained by prayer. The lesson was still farther enforced by the pastor remarking, as he left, that perhaps on his next visit she might be able to tell him of some want which

oppressed her, and then he would gladly pray.

The exhortation to pray therefore is one that needs explanation, and one that ought seldom to be given without some explanation. You "say" your prayers morning and evening. What do you mean by it? When such an individual is spoken of as a man of prayer, does it mean that he merely spends a few hours a day upon his knees? You may very dutifully perform your devotions, repeat or read at the same hour daily the stereotyped words, as well as assume the same attitudes, and thus you may think that you obey the exhortation to pray; but is this the end; having dutifully done all this, is it no more to be thought of? Is it that you have performed your task and nothing more must be expected from you?

There are those also who think to improve the performance of this task not only by attitudes which seem to them to be devout, but by adopting a whine, or sing-song, such as Hudibras ascribes to the Puritan of his day. Or the strain is set to music, and while praying the suppliant is careful to keep to the notes his music master prescribes. The presumption here is that God will be pleased with such beautiful devotions, and pleased with those who are so careful in their methods of approach to Him.

Prayer may thus become a mere religious task, and so far from any benefits accruing from such prayer, it may only feed the self-righteous spirit which dwells in every man. It is little better than that of the Pharisee who "stood and prayed thus with himself, God I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, or even as this publican."

Let us not forget that the call to prayer means a call to work, not a summons to set a-going a machine which needs neither brain nor heart. It is a call to gather up all the forces of the soul, and to summon them to the intensest activity. It is indeed the highest exercise to which man can be called. Remark the expressions used in Scripture to describe prayer. When Jacob prayed it is said that he "wrestled," "and he said I will not let thee go except Thou bless me." In the Psalms the suppliant "cries," "cries with a loud voice." "I am weary with my crying; my throat is dried; mine eyes fail while I wait for my God." Elijah, though a man of like passions with us, "prayed fervently." The prayer which availeth much in its working is the supplication of the righteous man. Such is the expressive language in which prayer is spoken of in Scripture, certainly teaching us the greatness of the work to which we are called when we are summoned to pray.

But nowhere in Scripture do we meet with the formal prayer—the prayer performed as a mere religious work. There is always some definite end in view. It is a means to an end, never a mere end. If we find Jacob on his knees, it is because he fears his brother Esau. If we find David praying, it is to thank God for his mercies, to glorify God for his perfections, to seek deliverance from his enemies, pardon for his sin, or a blessing on his house and people as being related to the kingdom of Christ. If we find Elijah praying earnestly, it is that it might not rain, in the hope that a famine might bring Israel to repentance. If the Apostle prays thrice it is that the thorn in the flesh may be removed. If he is anxious to visit Rome, “he makes request” that he may be prospered by the will of God. If he bows his knees unto the Father from whom every family in heaven and earth is named, it is that God may grant unto the Churches every grace. If the Lord Himself offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears, it was that he might safely pass through the sea of agony which was before him. Such is the representation given us in Scripture of the meaning of prayer. Therefore when we pray, if our prayers are not to be the vain repetitions of the heathen, they must have for their animating soul some definite end. We must be

engaged either in ascribing praise and glory to God, or thanking Him for His mercies, or confessing our sins and asking His forgiveness, or beseeching Him to bestow on us needful blessings, or interceding with Him on behalf of those causes and persons in whom we are interested. Without one or more of these constituents of prayer, there can be no prayer.

But, again, before there can be true prayer, it is essential that the suppliant believes that God is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. It must be that the man who really prays must have some faith in God, and that he will gain something by his prayer. His faith may be weak, his knowledge may be small ; but God is gracious, and how often does He surprise the trembling and the weak by His wonderful condescension. The travellers of the hundred and seventh psalm who, lost in the wilderness, cry to the Lord in their trouble and are delivered, may not have been habitual worshippers of the true God. And so with the prisoners and the sick in the same psalm. Even if we suppose them to have been men that feared God, yet these trials came upon them because "they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the Most High," or "because of their iniquities" ; and yet at their cry He brought them out of darkness and the

shadow of death, or sent His word and healed them. Yet in all and every case there must be some faith in God, otherwise prayer is impossible. And though, as we have said, faith may be weak, and there may be much darkness, yet God in His infinite goodness and mercy may overlook the infirmities of the petitioner and the defects of the prayer, and send the answer in peace. Is this the meaning of the words of the psalm (Ps. lxvi. 18-20). "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear; *but* verily God hath heard; He hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God which hath not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me."

But whilst God in His infinite compassion thus oftentimes is better than His word, we cannot presume upon His sovereignty. He has prescribed to us the conditions of our approach to Him, and we dare not ask Him to traverse His own dispensations. No man has a right to the ear of God save he who draws nigh unto Him in a spirit of obedience and loyalty.

The worldling, the Pharisee, those living in known sin, may use the words and forms of prayer, but God will be deaf to their cries. Here, no doubt, is often to be found the secret of unavailing prayer. God promises that our bread shall be given us, and our

waters shall be sure, but the man to whom the promise will be fulfilled is one who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, and in all respects keeps his hands clean. God promises that if we call upon him in the day of trouble He will deliver us. But the promise, like all the other promises, must be taken in its connections. The previous verse is certainly a preface to a successful calling upon him for deliverance. "Offer unto God the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High: *and* call upon Me." The same law in truth limits all the promises. It is not that obedience entitles us to the fulfilment of the promises, but obedience is the state upon which the promises may be safely conferred.

"Whatsoever we ask," says John in his first epistle, "we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things which are pleasing in His sight." The rule is again plainly stated by our Lord, when He says, "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

It will be seen from all this that the exhortation to pray, rightly understood, means much more than is apparent on the face of it. If it means, as it does, pray to live, it equally means live to pray. We cannot live without prayer. That is the ladder of communication between

earth and heaven. By this means we communicate our desires to God, and we ask of Him mercy and grace to help in the time of need. By His granting us an answer to our prayer we are able to live; and, since our need of mercy and grace is continuous, we cannot for long be absent from His footstool. But then on receiving mercy and grace, and being thereby enabled to live, we are able to pray, and then only can we really pray. Hence just as we pray to live so we live to pray. The dead soul cannot pray. The backsliding believer cannot pray. The spirit under a sense of guilt without the penitent's sighs cannot pray. David before the visit of Nathan doubtless continued his formal devotions, both in public and in private, but he did not pray. It was only when he acknowledged his sin that the words of the fifty-first psalm could flow from his lips and his heart. The saying of the man whose blindness was healed by washing in the pool of Siloam at the bidding of Jesus, which so disturbed the equanimity of the Pharisees — "We know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and do His will, him He heareth," is abundantly true when we understand what is meant by the words.

And this will remind us of the great and encouraging truth that there is a new and

living way, "through the veil, that is to say, His flesh." If God never heard sinners the door would be closed against every member of the human race. If at any time we recognise the fact that we are sinful creatures it is when we approach the footstool of Him whom Jesus calls Holy Father. His holiness reveals our sin. And not only are we conscious of possessing sinful natures, not only do our prayers proceed from sinful lips, but our prayers, even when the Spirit of grace and supplication is felt to be with us, are marred and defiled by sin. Here especially is it true that when we would do good evil is present with us. What more humiliating than the review of our approaches to God? How hard it is sometimes to believe that our prayers can be heard; how easy it would be to believe that our prayers in themselves would condemn us. But this is the source of our confidence that we approach the footstool of the Eternal by the new and living way which he hath opened for us through the veil, that is to say, through His flesh. This secures us though sinners a way of access into the very presence of God. And not only have we a way of access, but we have the great High Priest, Jesus Himself, to introduce us, to speak for us, to gather together our broken accents, to interpret them for us, to perfume them with the incense of His blood

and righteousness and thus render them acceptable to God. Did we see our best prayers after they had passed through His hands they would be so transfigured that we would scarce be able to recognise them. Thus we say at one time, how is it possible that our prayers can be heard? And we say at another, how can they fail to be heard? Such is the mystery of prayer. "Lord teach us to pray."

II

PRAYER—A LAW

IN these papers we do not purpose to write any formal treatise on prayer, neither do we propose to shut ourselves up to any logical order ; we will merely write down the thoughts that occur to us, and as they occur. If they are considered only as detached thoughts, we will not complain. One object we will keep before us, and only one—to encourage the reader to engage hopefully in this delightful exercise of prayer. If this purpose is served, we shall have gained the end which we seek, caring nothing though we are guilty of violating logical order, or of repeating ourselves.

Treatises on prayer usually begin by answering objections. Various difficulties, scientific and philosophic, have usually to be cleared away in the first instance. Well, we will leave these difficulties alone ; we think we know them all, and they all have been answered as far as they can be answered a thousand times. But we are tired of them. Those who advance them would not be content whatever

answer was given. You may silence the objector, but you cannot convince him. This is not a question of pure mathematics where the mind is evenly balanced. It is a moral question, and on all moral questions the mind has a bias. No argument, therefore, will have much weight with him whose bias is on the wrong side. It is only, "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak from myself."

We do not trouble ourselves, therefore, in the least with objections, scientific or other. Facts are the best answer to theories. The cardinals, no doubt, proved to Galileo that the earth could not move round the sun, but still "it moves," says the astronomer. And so all the array of the masters of science may prove to us that it is absurd to expect God to answer prayer. That will not affect us in the least; we know that He does. Each generation testifies to this fact to its successor. All ages bear witness to it. The experience of living men tells the same story. And what believer could not produce, out of the secret archives of his heart's history, tales, more marvellous than any that are written, of God as the hearer of prayer? We put aside, therefore, with a smile of compassion, the fine-spun theories of men who know no more of spiritual life than the peasant does of the stars.

As our generation is fond of reducing everything to scientific formulas, let us begin by defining prayer as a law—a law of God's kingdom, a law of God's ordaining, a law as sure and certain as any other law.

A law is an order of procedure. We have first the cause, and then the effect. Or, better still, we have first the antecedent, and then the consequent. We seek to reach a certain end, and for this purpose we use the appointed means. The husbandman desires to reap in the harvest season, and for this reason he sows in spring. The sowing is the means, the reaping is the end. And so in every direction we attain our ends by using means which experience or observation tells us these means will bring about.

Let us add farther, that it is by no means necessary that we should understand how the means bring about these desired ends. Here our ignorance is great. Who can explain how it should be that the seed we sow in spring invariably makes its appearance in autumn manyfold? We only know the fact. We may speak of cause and effect, but this only hides our ignorance. All we can say is that one thing follows another, and follows so invariably that we call it a law; that we count upon it, and with the utmost confidence take advantage of it. We speak in this sense of the laws of

matter, motion, and such like, understanding by the expression that certain effects will be produced by certain causes.

Now the same Creator who ordained all these laws ordained this law — the law of prayer. Here is the law, "Ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you."

If you ask how can this be? we are not careful to answer. If you raise difficulties we are not anxious to explain them away. You may ask precisely the same questions with regard to anything. How is it possible that steam can drive a railway train, or propel a vessel through the ocean? How is it possible for a wire submerged in the sea to carry a message from this land to America? How can it be that the lordly oak should spring from the insignificant acorn? All these and such like questions will ever remain unanswered. We know only that it is so. We know only that these are the laws which they severally obey. And this knowledge we turn to account. It is by taking advantage of these laws that the business of life is carried on.

If it be objected again that these laws are uniform and invariable, that we can count upon them with absolute certainty, whereas we cannot so surely predict the result of prayer, the answer is, that we have the same certainty in

the one case as in the other. It does not always follow that effect follows cause, or rather that the causes we mean to set in motion produce the effects we desire? How many failures are there in life? How often are we beaten and baffled? Yet we may have exerted ourselves to the utmost, and utilised all the knowledge that we possessed. How do we account for these failures? They are owing to some flaw in the causes which we have relied upon. If the seed which the husbandman sows should, unknown mayhap to him, be worthless, then he will have the disappointing experience of having sown and yet having failed to reap. Or, in like manner, let there be a deficiency of steam, or let there be some flaw in the machinery, and the vessel will scarce move in the water, or the train leave the station. Hence, whilst we must admit that the laws of nature are uniform and invariable, our experience of their working is by no means so.

Now it is exactly the same with the law of prayer. It is as uniform and invariable as are other laws; but then we may fail to use it aright, and the result will necessarily be failure. But this failure on our part does not prove that the law is uncertain. God promises to hear us, for instance, only if we ask in the name of Christ. But if anyone should presume upon the promise, "Ask and it shall be given you,"

and therefore present his petition without pleading the name of Christ, well, here is a flaw in his prayer which will ordinarily make it unavailing. But such an experience does not in the least militate against the law of prayer. Or, in like manner, we are commanded to lift up holy hands without wrath or doubting. But if, in spite of this, we venture to engage in this holy exercise full of malice and all uncharitableness, the prayer will be worse than in vain. And thus onward. All the failures of this law are only seeming failures. The law itself cannot fail. The veracity of Jehovah is pledged here in a far more absolute sense than to any other law whatsoever.

The whole universe hangs upon, shall we say, the laws of God. It is because of their invariable working that the sun knows his place, and the moon her day and hour. It is because of their invariable working that summer follows spring, and the autumnal harvest crowns the labours of man. It is because we can reckon with absolute certainty upon them that we go forth to our daily tasks, and the world's work is done. If, then, the laws of God, or the Divine veracity, never fails us in other things, how should it fail us here?

Yet again, it may seem as if there was a congruity between antecedents and consequents in other things which does not appear in the

law of prayer. In other words, we would naturally expect the consequences which follow from the operation of ordinary laws, whereas here there may seem no natural or necessary connection between prayer and its answer.

Supposing this allegation were true, the fiat of the Sovereign Ruler is enough to link together the act of asking on man's part and the act of giving on His. If He has ordained this relationship, that is enough. Even if the congruity were altogether invisible, that ought not to affect our faith in the law. We prophesy to dry bones as we are commanded ; and we expect that our prophesying will not be in vain, because it hath pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe. Hence though it might be represented as the most absurd thing in the world to suppose that the suppliant on his knees could influence God in the heavens, we would answer simply, Has He said it? If so, that is enough. He said, Let there be light, and there was light. And can He not equally say, He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him? But we cannot admit a want of congruity between man's asking and God's consequent giving. It is, in truth, the most natural thing we can imagine. He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see? He that gave to parents the heart of parents, hath He

not such a heart Himself? If He proclaims Himself the husband of His people, shall not the husband attend to the requests of the wife? If He is infinite in power, wisdom, and love, can He have made man in His own image and fail to have a regard to the work of His own hands? And the instincts of universal humanity in all ages, and in all climes, have always prompted men to pray; and men cannot pray if they do not expect that their prayers will be heard. Therefore we would insist upon it, that to pray and to expect to gain something by our prayers is just as natural as to eat and to expect that we shall thus gain health and strength. Man's moral nature needs first to be perverted before he can seriously question the efficacy of prayer. That this perversion is sometimes accomplished by a false philosophy is not astonishing. We have not a single instinct which has not sometimes been in like manner perverted. What stronger passion do we possess than the love of life, yet men have taught and believed that suicide is lawful, and on occasions becomes a duty. Yes, men will pray. All the reasonings of a false science, and all false philosophy, will never silence the voice of prayer. The simple will confess they cannot refute the theories of the philosopher, still they must pray. And if for a time the instinct is crushed down, a crisis will one day come when

the instinct will reassert its authority, and the hardened unbeliever will be found crying to God.

In order to impress upon the reader this aspect of prayer, we shall close this chapter by a few quotations. Dr Hodge says of prayer :—
“It is an appointed means to an end, and has the same relation in the moral government of God that other second causes have to these effects. It is an antecedent *sine quâ non*. The objection that God has determined to give or not to give those blessings for which we pray, and that His purpose cannot be changed by our prayers, has no more force than in any other case where means are connected with an end. The objection that it is derogatory to God to be pleased with our praises and thanks has no force, if it is right to praise and thank Him. God is pleased with what is right. The objection confounds God with man. Because it is unseemly to praise a creature, it is assumed to be unseemly to praise God.”

Again, “Prayer is no fiction,” says Dr Phelps in his “Still Hour;” “it has, and God has *determined* that it should have, a positive and an appreciative influence in directing the course of a human life. It is, and God has *purposed* that it should be, a link of connection between the human mind and the Divine mind, by which, through His infinite condescension, we may actually

move His will. It is, God has *decreed* that it should be a power in the universe, as distinct, as real, as natural, and as uniform as the power of gravitation, or of light, or of electricity. A man may *use* it as trustingly, as soberly as he would use any of these. It is as truly the dictate of good sense that a man should expect to achieve something by praying, as it is that he should expect to achieve something by a telescope, or the mariner's compass, or the electric telegraph."

Again, the same writer, speaking of faith in prayer, says the man of prayer will preface his devotions thus :—"I come to my devotions this morning on an errand of real life. This is no romance, and no farce. I do not come here to go through a form of words. I have no hopeless desires to express. I have an object to gain. I have an end to accomplish. This is a *business* in which I am about to engage. An astronomer does not turn his telescope to the skies with a more reasonable hope of penetrating those distant heavens than I have of reaching the mind of God, by lifting up my heart at the throne of grace. This is the privilege of my calling of God in Christ Jesus. Even my faltering voice is now to be heard in heaven, and it is to put forth a power there, the results of which only God can know, and only eternity can develop. 'Therefore, O Lord, Thy servant findeth it in his heart to pray this prayer unto

Thee.' 'Good prayers,' says an old English divine, 'never come weeping home. I am sure I shall receive either what I ask, or what I should ask.' Such a habit of feeling as this, will give to prayer that quality which Dr Chalmers observed as being the characteristic of the prayers of Dr Doddridge—that they had an intensely 'business-like' spirit."

We quote the same writer yet once more:—"Human art has now succeeded in extending the electric telegraph almost around the globe. But yonder is a child, whose lisping tongue is every day doing more than that. In God's administration of things, that child's morning prayer is a mightier reality than that. It sets in motion agencies more secret and more impalpable, and yet conscious agencies, whose chief vocation, so far as we know it, is to minister at that child's bidding. 'Verily, I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.' Could we appreciate prayer, think you, as such a reality, such a power, so genuine, so vital a thing in the working of the Divine plan, so free from trammel in its mystery, so much resembling the power of God, *because* of its mystery, and yet could we find it to be in our own experience an insipid duty?"

Here, then, is an aspect of prayer which may well encourage the most desponding. "Behold,"

says the Apostle James, "the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it." But his patience is rewarded. He does not sow in vain. God's promise of seed-time and harvest never fails. Let us sow in like manner. Surely the Divine nature is good soil to sow in. We are often, as the husbandman, called to exercise patience. God's processes seem to us often slow. But we must allow time for the orderly development of the seed we sow. Therefore, when there is no cloud in the sky to foretell the coming shower, let us still say, "I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me."

III

PRAYER IN THE NAME OF JESUS

“FOR Christ’s sake” is a formula invariable and instinctive in all Christian prayer. Whether we understand its meaning or not, we would not feel we had prayed at all unless we concluded with the time-honoured words.

Why is it that Bible words and phrases are repeated from childhood to old age without our feeling that we have outgrown them? “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” This rule does not in its literal sense apply here. As children, simple and ignorant, we prayed for Christ’s sake; as men and women, the words were fresher and dearer than ever; as trembling on the brink of the grave, for very age, we still say “for Christ’s sake.” A most striking proof, surely, of the divinity of the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit never leads us past a truth, but leads us up to it. We can never outgrow Divine truth. Those who say they have, only confess thereby that they have never entered into it. It grows faster than we grow. Not

one of the truths of Scripture ever grows stale. As our experience deepens, we utter the same truths, only with deeper meaning and fuller comprehension. The aged saint and the little child can say the same prayer, and sing the same song.

“For Christ’s sake” is one of these phrases which we carry with us from infancy to age. As we grow we find them like the waters of Ezekiel’s vision—they come first up to the ankles, then to the knees, then to the loins, then they become waters to swim in. Nay, more, after a long lifetime’s use and study, can we venture to say that we have touched the bottom of this sea, that we comprehend all that is wrapped up within them? We are well sure that treatise after treatise has expounded them, and they are yet virgin soil for every new explorer.

In venturing to expound these words, we are appalled at the difficulty of the task. Let not the reader think that he has mastered the whole subject when he reads all that we can write. Let him rather conclude that he has been only gathering shells on the sea-shore; and that even what he gathers only the Holy Spirit can really enable him to apprehend.

Perhaps the earliest meaning which we attach to the phrase is this,—being ourselves exceedingly sinful, and God ineffably holy, we feel we

cannot approach God without a Mediator; and in Christ and His atonement we find a shield and a shelter, which enable us to approach God's footstool with hope. We tremblingly think of God as a consuming fire, and, therefore, we carefully hide when we come into His presence behind the person and work of the Mediator.

Now there can be nothing wrong in such an attitude. It was thus that all the Old Testament saints prayed. They had great thoughts of the holiness of God, and deep views of their own sinfulness. And most beginners in the Divine life will commence their prayer life in this spirit. It is plain, however, that the spirit of bondage is here. Such prayers are not prefaced, as Christ teaches us, by the words "Our Father who art in Heaven." There is a clear view of God's holiness, but not an equally clear understanding of His love. There is a high valuation of Christ's sacrifice, but a very limited conception of all that His sacrifice has attained for us. There is a knowledge of the fact that Christ has purchased safety, but only a dim understanding of the fact that Christ has made Himself one with us.

If, however, we have attained thus far, we may well thank and praise God. We have access to His footstool. Our person and our prayers will be accepted for the sake of Christ.

It is a right beginning, and this is almost everything. Greater liberty and greater boldness will yet come.

Yet again, this also is implied in the words for "Christ's sake," that when we pray we have set out on an errand upon which Christ has sent us. We would not have ventured to knock at heaven's gate had not Christ commanded us. We would not have ventured to ask expecting to receive had He not commissioned us so to do. The beggar may knock boldly at the lordly mansion when the errand upon which he comes has been given him by its master or its master's son. Now we have Christ's warrant, Christ's command to petition at God's footstool. It is He who says, "Ask, and it shall be given you." It is He who says, "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." It is He who speaks the parable unto the end that men ought always to pray and not to faint. It is He who dictates to us, "Our Father which art in Heaven."

We cannot, therefore, be intruders or unwelcome when we have such a warrant for approaching God's footstool. Nor would He send us on a vain errand. Let unbelief protest as it pleases, we cannot be on the wrong path when we are walking in the way of Christ's commandments.

"Come, my soul, thy suit prepare,
Jesus loves to answer prayer ;
He Himself hath bid thee pray,
Therefore will not say thee nay."

But even further than this, Christ Jesus "received gifts for men, yea for the rebellious also." As the result of His work, He purchased for us every good and perfect gift. He has as His treasury "unsearchable riches." He is Head over all things to His Church. When, therefore, we come to the Father to ask, we ask what hath already been purchased for us; we ask, by Christ's bidding, what is Christ's. Say a son in a distant land sent home to his father to keep for him the wealth he has been accumulating; though it is stored up at home and in his father's hand, it is still his to dispose of as he thinks fit. Suppose he sends a friend to his father with a message that he is to deliver to him a certain sum, the father would not and could not refuse. In the first place, he would give a warm welcome to his son's friend, because he was his friend; and, in the second place, he would cheerfully comply with his son's request, and give what was asked for.

When we pray in the name of Christ, this is precisely what we do. We expect a welcome from His Father, and, because His Father, ours also, for His sake; and we expect that He will liberally supply our wants out of the store He purchased for us by His death.

We can even mount a step higher. Our Mediator is now with the Father. He is exalted at God's right hand, a Prince and a

Saviour. He is our Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He continually makes intercession for us. When the petitioner comes to the Father's door, He is there before him to welcome him, to interpret his broken utterances, and to plead his cause. As High Priest over the house of God, He, shall we say, takes charge of the suppliant and his cause. He makes it His. This ensures a gracious reception and a gracious answer. This conceals the infirmities of the petitioner, and the requests are seen only in the light which the Mediator gives them.

And this leads us a step further. Consider the meaning of the great word which Paul so often used—in Christ. When we come to God's footstool in the name of Christ, we come in Christ. It is not the poor sinner who is visible then, but the sinner hidden in the surety. "The glory which Thou gavest Me," says our Lord, "I have given them." With it His people are covered; in it they are hid. Krummacher thus expands this truth,—“We all know that to seek anything in the name of any one is considered, throughout the world, nothing else but to represent the person of some one in some cause or other. So that if I say to you, for instance, you are to request of one or other of my friends aught in my name, and you do so, then surely it is not, strictly speaking, you that ask, but it is

I who am the petitioner. My influence in this case passes over to you, and stands you in good stead, and were you to receive a refusal, it is not you who would feel mortified, but I. Only imagine then what a privilege the Saviour extends to us when He encourages us to ask the Father in His name! For what else can He mean to say than that we may by faith suppose ourselves standing completely in His place, and thus, free and glad, walk before the Father as if *we* were Christ; and that we may expect for our supplications the same open and inclined ear which His prayers ever found with the Father, and regard ourselves as of those upon whom, before God, the entire grace of the only begotten Son has been outpoured, that we may continue in the blessed conviction that God knows us no longer according to the flesh, and will reflect that if He cast us off from Himself, and felt ashamed of us, it would not be, strictly speaking, *us* that He would cast off and mortify, but Him, His own Son? Oh! what a wonderful circumstance!" In connection with this we may read, and in some measure see into, the meaning of the great saying of our Lord, "At that day ye shall ask in My name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God."

Here, surely is a banner fitted to rally all the powers of faith. The words of the hymn are literally true,—

“So near to God, so very near,
I cannot nearer be ;
For in the person of His Son,
I am as near as He.

“So dear to God, so very dear,
I cannot dearer be ;
For in the person of His Son,
I am as dear as He.”

When we come to God, then let us come in Christ. Let us be clothed with His righteousness, with His glory, with Himself. His pierced hands, His wounded side, His tears, His agonies and cries all plead with us. And it is His Father and our Father with whom we speak.

We have not yet exhausted the deep import of this plea. It is easy to see that it is possible so to use the name of Christ that it cannot benefit us. Mere words, however correct and suitable, cannot avail us with God. Prayer is not a mechanical act as the counting of beads, or turning the handle of a praying machine. The intellect and the affections are, on the contrary, intensely engaged in all true prayer. Now prayer in the name of Christ implies a position, a state, and a consequent right.

What is to hinder any man signing a cheque for another? Nothing, save this, if that other has not authorised the man to perform this

act. But if the master authorises his servant, or the father authorises his son to sign his name, then the action is lawful, and the draft will be honoured. Now the Lord Jesus authorises all those who are His to sign His name. They have the use of it. They can attach it to any of the promises which He has given us, and the bill will be honoured, because the name attached to it is Christ's. But it is plain that before the name can be at the disposal of any one, he must consent to become one of God's family circle. Come inside first by the open door, which Christ is, and then all the family privileges are ours. The supposition that it is possible to stand outside, and to refuse submission to the yoke of Christ, and when one thinks fit the name of Christ will avail him for the good things he asks, is something like blasphemy. This would be to imagine that God could countenance an attempt to serve God and mammon. Nay, it is to His true-hearted disciples that the Lord gives His name. It is theirs, and theirs only. It cannot be in possession of an enemy. It is an amazing act of condescension that He should confide His name to His friends. Hence the first step to the possession of Christ's name is to become one of His friends; is, in other words, to become reconciled to God. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to

become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

Yet again, though Christ condescends to give us the use of His name, it can only be available for such things as He will approve. When the merchant in his absence entrusts his confidential servant with the power of signing his name, it is an understood thing between them that he uses the authority given him only on such occasions as he would himself if he were at home. The servant would not dare to use his master's name outside, say, his master's business, or for things he had no reason to believe his master would countenance. The same rule must apply here.

"Ye ask and receive not," says the Apóstle James, "because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." The name cannot avail should we ask that we may consume it upon our lusts. When He gave us His name, this was necessarily implied. Now, we may often cherish desires in our hearts which we dare not present to God in the name of Christ. The purse may be well filled, but if you enter a shop and ask for a supply of poison, your request will be declined, and your money refused. Hence, then, before we use the name of Christ, we must ascertain whether that which

we ask is such as Christ would approve. Is it such a petition as Christ Himself would present were He in the same circumstances as yours? Is the gift you seek one which Christ Himself would encourage you to ask? To answer this question will often involve much searching of heart, and that even when the thing in itself is good.

Here we may safely say the Word and Spirit will be a sufficient guide. Have you promises relating to that which you desire? Can it be comprehended under the head of seeking the glory of God? Would it tend to the sanctification of yourselves and others? Would it add to your usefulness, and advance the kingdom of Christ? Such questions must be asked before we venture to use the name of Christ. And should we after all err, rest assured the petition will die on our lips. It will cease to be an object of desire, and, therefore, cease to be a subject of prayer.

Let us not be supposed, however, to teach that the child of God will be left to his own unaided reasonings in his intercourse with God. The Spirit helpeth our infirmities, He inspires the true prayer. Christ abides in us by His Spirit, and we abide in Him. Thus a spiritual instinct guides the man of prayer. And even should he mistake, the water will be turned into wine, and the prayer, so far

from being lost, will return with a richer ending than the petitioner in his most hopeful moods conceived.

Here, then, kindly reader, is only an attempt to indicate the riches encased in the name of Christ. When you have mastered all we have tried to teach, you will be only at the beginning of the lesson. Here is a study for a lifetime—a study to be pursued under the teaching of the Spirit of Christ. But as this name is the key which opens the treasures of heaven, the knowledge is not only desirable for itself, but it enables poor feeble man to share the throne of Omnipotence.

IV

THE PRAYER OF FAITH

THIS is a topic that requires delicate handling. There is much written about the prayer of faith from which we must strongly dissent. There is much written, indeed, which is not, in our judgment, honestly written, and is, and must be, misleading, should it be accepted, and will end in disappointment and dismay. No doubt there are exceptional men and exceptional times. There are strange and peculiar experiences. Men who have lived in persecuting times, for instance, have had often great nearness to God, and enjoyed the open vision in an almost miraculous degree. God is both sovereign and infinite in compassion; therefore we may say He sometimes surpasses Himself. But the extraordinary is not the rule; and if we attempt to make the extraordinary the rule, our disappointments will be many and bitter.

Now there is a definition of the prayer of faith which we unhesitatingly reject. It is this: That every special petition will be granted on the condition that the petitioner

believes it will be granted. You fall sick, for instance, or you are afflicted with a spinal complaint; then, if you ask God to remove the sickness, to heal the disease, and *believe* that God will grant your request, you will certainly recover. Now when a benevolent gentleman, wearing spectacles, preaches this doctrine, we look at his spectacles. We say to him, There is some weakness about your eyes. Why do you resort to the optician? Clearly here is a case for the application of your doctrine. We cannot imagine what answer he could give to such a query. He could not say that he preferred the mechanical appliance to the naked eye. If he should say that he submitted to the affliction, and that it was inevitable, then his contention is gone; his seemingly high doctrine proves good only on some rare occasions.

Let us not be understood, however, to deny that there are spiritual experiences which seem to support this doctrine. Elijah prayed that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. We do not read anywhere that Elijah had a promise on which he built his faith. Neither does he in words say, "Do as Thou hast said." Yet we must believe that the Spirit of God put

these petitions into his heart. He would conclude that the God of Israel would be glorified, and the people of Israel might be brought to repentance by such miracles. But over and above this, there must have been a secret impression produced upon his soul that he ought to offer such petitions, and that his prayer would be accepted. Hence he would pray boldly, and in faith, and expect the answer which was granted to him. It was a prayer of faith, because God gave him in some way what was really a promise. Otherwise, it is evident, he had no warrant to pray such a prayer, and to be persuaded of an answer.

Even so the Spirit of God is sovereign still, and has the same access to the human spirit; and He undoubtedly does sometimes give an impulse to pray for some particular thing which is equivalent to a promise. In such a case, let him who is so favoured follow the cloud. He will not be disappointed. But we repeat the extraordinary cannot be our everyday rule.

Now if the law of prayer were that God gives to every suppliant everything he asks for, if he believes that it would be granted, plainly that is making man, not God, the master of the universe. Apply the same rule to the household; and the household would be ruled,

not by its head, but according to the caprice of the children. Is God to have no will? Is man's wisdom to be the rule of God's? Is there to be no scope for his knowledge and love? Is He to resign the helm of His administration, and to change places with His short-sighted creatures? Two of His children seek the same situation, and if both are to pray the prayer of faith in this sense, being persuaded that God will give the very thing that they ask, how can each prayer be answered?

Or yet again, the wisest and the best of men often make the gravest of mistakes. They will desire and ask for what would bring disaster and ruin upon themselves and others. Philip Henry, in enumerating the mercies of his life, was in the habit of thanking God that in his early days he narrowly escaped a place at court. His father, probably thinking that the position was the most desirable possible for his son, may have prayed God earnestly to make him the successful candidate. Had God answered his prayer according to its literal terms, we would have had no Philip Henry and the beautiful story of Broadoak; and we would have had no "Matthew Henry," ~~who~~ who has been the delight and solace of generations, and will be for generations to come.

It is farther evident that, seeing we are erring creatures, no thoughtful Christian will wish that his every desire should be granted. He knows that God's will is better than his own. He will desire God's will to be done rather than his own. And while he makes his requests known to God, and asks what he judges would be best, yet he will refer the matter to God. He will leave the decision with Him. And if He should deny him, he will thank God for the denial, and will be persuaded he has made a happy escape from some evil into which, if left to himself, he would have been plunged.

It is contrary to all experience, therefore, that the prayer of faith can mean that whatever the petitioner prays for, believing he will obtain his literal request, will be granted. It is to be feared that the preaching of this doctrine has been a stumbling-block to many souls. It tends to weaken faith in prayer, instead of strengthening it. It is unscriptural, unreasonable and absurd.

But now, if this is not the prayer of faith, what is it? We know that we ought to pray in faith. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. It is according to our faith that the answer will be.

The first requisite to the prayer of faith is plainly that the petitioner be a man of faith, or

be a believer. We do not say that God never hears the unbeliever. Here is a story that Mr Spurgeon tells of himself. He was preaching to children in some strange place of worship. He exhorted them to pray, and said that before his actual conversion he had prayed for common mercies, and God had heard his prayers. This statement brought a number of cavillers about him. In the midst of the discussion, an old woman with a red cloak pushed her way into the circle, and said,—

“What is this you say, that God does not hear natural prayer? Why, does He not hear the young ravens when they cry unto Him, and do you think they offer spiritual prayers?”

The river of God's goodness does often overflow its banks; but still it is plain that he does not pray the prayer of faith who is himself an unbeliever. There must be a faith that God is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him. The person must be accepted before the prayer can be accepted. The promises are the heritage of His children. “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.”

Yet again, an essential ingredient in the prayer of faith is that it be in the name of

Christ. There is no rational ground for entertaining the hope, that our persons or our prayers can be accepted outside the name of Christ. God cannot, in consistency with His character as a holy and a just being, be in friendship with the sinner out of Christ. The judge who should consort with the criminal, and show him the favour due only to the righteous, would be himself the greater criminal of the two, and would be the enemy of all righteousness. It is only through the shedding of blood that there can be remission. And as God cannot enter into fellowship with the sinner out of Christ, so the sinner has no plea which he can plead apart from Christ. He cannot plead his deserts, for he only deserves death. He cannot urge his loyalty to God, for he is a prodigal son. He cannot even plead God's mercy, inasmuch as mercy without justice would be wickedness.

When, on the contrary, the petitioner comes in the name of Christ, he has a plea which begets faith, and on which faith may lean. Through Christ we have access to God's footstool. The blood of Jesus is the new and living way which He hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say his flesh. It is possible to draw near with a true heart, in the full assurance of faith, when we venture by God's way of access. God is no longer the

consuming fire. The door is open, and open for sinners. Moreover, as Christ is the way, it is from Him we obtain all our pleas. We cannot plead our own merits, but we can plead His. We cannot ask for our own sakes, but we can ask for His. We cannot pretend that we deserve, but we know that He deserves. We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins. This is certainly the way of faith, and all this must be implied in the prayer of faith. There is no foothold for faith in any other direction.

Again, it is implied in the prayer of faith that the things prayed for are objects of faith, according to God's will, or that they are blessings which are the subjects of God's promises.

This rule divides itself into several branches. To speak first of direct spiritual blessings, which are the subjects of promise, the prayer of faith certainly implies that the petitioner must expect, and believe that he receives, that which he asks. Let him ask for the forgiveness of his sins, for the Holy Spirit, for grace to help in the time of need, and such like, and it is his business to believe that these gifts are his ; that, as he rises from his knees he rises the possessor of the things he has been seeking. The *feeling* of their possession may not be his ; but the

faith of their possession ought to be his. The warrant of God's word ought to be sufficient to dispel every doubt, and to assure him that what he asks is already his. To doubt here is unbelief, is sin ; yea, to doubt here is to make God a liar.

Yet again, there are promises as absolute as those which are not so directly fulfilled. There is the promise of deliverance in trouble, the promise of our daily bread, and such like ; they are absolute promises. We ought to plead them with a perfect assurance of being heard and answered. Here the prayer of faith means that as we ask for deliverance, we assuredly expect deliverance ; that as we ask for our daily bread, we assuredly expect our daily bread. Here we cannot be too confident. It is sin to doubt ; yet, need we add, while we do not question God's veracity, or fail to believe He will give that which he hath promised, the manner of His answering the prayer must be left to him. We may make known our desires as to the manner in which we would prefer the answer to come, but only in submission to his superior wisdom. Faith fastens upon the promise, but it can go no further. Now the promise pertains only to the thing promised, but it does not indicate the method in which God will fulfil it. Here there is no warrant for such prayers as are sometimes offered being

literally answered. If I ask for my daily bread, I ask for that which God hath promised to give, and I am bound to ask in faith ; yea, to be sure that my daily bread will come, that I ought to give myself no anxiety, though the next meal time is at hand and I do not know whence the supply is to come. Faith must go that length if it is to honour God. But if I ask that my neighbour may be moved to invite me to his table, my prayer is perfectly legitimate ; but it is one which I cannot pray absolutely. It may not be God's will to supply my want in that way. I have no promise that in that fashion He will fulfil my petition. It would not be the prayer of faith, in the Scripture sense of the word, to ask that my want should be supplied in this particular way, and to believe that the answer must come in that particular way. Here will be perceived a sharp distinction between what is often advocated as the prayer of faith, and the prayer of faith according to Scripture.

The same rule applies to all the promises of Scripture. Faith fastens upon the promise, but may not go beyond it. I am sure that God will give me what He promises, but I cannot be sure that He will fulfil His promise in my way. The reader will here remember the beautiful hymn of John Newton :—

"I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith, and love, and every grace ;
Might more of His salvation know,
And seek more earnestly His face.

"'Twas He who taught me thus to pray,
And He, I trust, has answered prayer,
But it has been in such a way
As almost drove me to despair.

"I thought that in some favoured hour
At once He'd grant me my request,
And by His love-constraining power
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

"Instead of this, He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart,
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in every part.

"'Lord, why is this?' I trembling cried,
'Wilt Thou pursue Thy worm to death?'
'Tis in this way,' the Lord replied,
'I answer prayer for grace and faith.

"'These inward trials I employ,
From self and sin to set thee free,
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
That thou mayest find them all in Me.'"

There remains yet an almost boundless field of supplication, in which the child of God may wander at will. In everything, says the Apostle, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make your requests known unto God. We may find promises applicable to every desire which can arise in the Christian's soul. Even when we cannot find a direct promise, we may, by in-

ference, or by the study of God's character and ways, obtain encouragement to present special petitions. I would like such a situation. It would be very suitable to me. It would relieve me of many present difficulties ; it would fall in with my present tastes, wishes, and wants. Therefore I may lawfully ask it of God. The child may come to his father and ask him for anything. But it does not follow that I ought to conclude that, since I exceedingly desire this seeming good, therefore I must ask it, and believe that I will obtain it. Nay, the prayer of faith asks, but leaves the Heavenly Father to decide whether the sought-for boon be good ; leaves Him to give or withhold as He in His wisdom sees best. Could we desire anything more ? Could we wish and pray for a calamity ? Nay, as we thank God for answered prayers, we may well thank Him for unanswered prayers. How often in life are we permitted to see in due time God's goodness in refusing our petitions !

But even farther than this, though the particular petition may not be granted, let us not suppose that the prayer has been in vain. God did not give you the situation you prayed for. True. But you have no reason to complain. He gave you greater contentment with the one you already fill. He gave you greater comfort in it ; gave you unlooked-for success in it ; and

gives you to see that it is the best possible place for one of your abilities, tastes, and acquirements. Surely, then, you will confess that He gave exceeding abundantly above what you asked or thought.

V

THE MATTER OF PRAYER

THE matter of prayer is usually comprehended under the five heads of adoration, confession, petition, thanksgiving and intercession. And this does indeed include everything. We have in the Lord's Prayer a summary of all prayer. There is no feeling which we can express before God of which we may not find the germ in the Lord's Prayer.

But though we may thus classify the desires which fill our souls when we go before God, and arrange them, the living suppliant will discard all rules, and pray as his spirit, or as the Spirit prompts him. In the prayers of David we find no rule observed. He sometimes bursts out at once in petition; sometimes he begins with thanksgiving. Sometimes his confessions will follow his petitions; and sometimes he, at the outset, proclaims his faith. And this is true to the exercises of the human soul. Its moods are changing, its needs are various; and the sincere suppliant, having to deal with a loving and compassionate Father, will not feel himself tied down to any settled

order, but will freely pour out his heart before Him. Let some crisis, for example, arise, and the urgent petition will come first to the lips. Let, on the contrary, the desire be for some long-sought-for boon, and the soul will calm itself, stir itself up, summon faith to its aid by a deliberate recounting of God's attributes by way of invocation. Let it be sin which defiles the conscience, and confession will be the burden of the soul's aspiration; or let a cherished hope be fulfilled, and the song of thanksgiving will be the chief characteristic of the prayer. Here then is the liberty and frankness of the child dealing with one who is "how much more" a Father than the fathers of our flesh.

But if there is this liberty of order and arrangement, there must also be a liberty of matter. What things may we bring before God? Here we may remark human life is all of a piece. The man cannot be divided; neither can his life. All things are sacred or all things are profane. One thing is so interwoven with another that oftentimes that which seems least will be the most influential factor in life. Hence, even if it were desirable, it would be impossible to partition off any portion of our life and say, this is God's, and this is man's; we may bring this before God, but not that; this concerns ourselves, that concerns

God. It is plain therefore, that the whole life must be spread open before God. This abolishes at once all distinctions between the sacred and the secular, between the important and the trivial. Things are sacred and important or otherwise according to their bearing upon the soul's intercourse with God.

In speaking of the relative importance of the different departments of prayer, we must follow the rule of the Lord's Prayer, and begin with "the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Naturally we are disposed to reverse the order. Our own personal needs are so present and pressing that these are ever ready to come uppermost, and then they occupy us so much that the time which ought to be devoted to praise and thanksgiving is often wanting. The consequence of this is that faith is weakened and prayer becomes so purely selfish that it loses its power both over ourselves and God. Praise and thanksgiving is a shorter road to the heart of God than naked petition. Here is a suppliant for mercy and forgiveness. He cries, let us say, day and night for the forgiveness of God. As his sense of sin grows with his cries for its pardon, he sinks deeper in the mire, and the coveted mercy seems to recede farther and farther from his grasp. He is often in truth looking down into the darkness of his own soul, and seeking consolation there.

He is seeking to excite the compassion of God, and to move Him to come to his relief. But while there is much here with which we can sympathise, is this altogether the right attitude? Is God unwilling to show mercy? Is He an unjust Judge, who needs prayers and tears before He will be moved from an indifference which seems natural to Him? Who will venture to think so? "If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?" There needs no atonement, for an atonement has been already offered up. There need no prayers and tears to move the compassionate heart of God, as He is already abundant in goodness and truth. A far shorter road to deliverance is that prescribed by God Himself—"Offer unto God thanksgiving and pay thy vows unto the
* Most High: and call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me."

In other words, begin with thanksgiving or praise. Hath God given us Jesus Christ? Is there no room for thanksgiving there? Hath He not given us the blood which cleanseth from all sin? Is there no room for thanksgiving there? Hath He not promised us the help of His Holy Spirit? Hath He not revealed Himself to us as He that heareth

prayer, unto whom all flesh must come? What room for thanksgiving is here? Let the petitioner thus set out to thank and praise God, and he will find himself unconsciously taking possession of God's promises. Faith is born, and grows strong under the process. We soon discover, to our astonishment and delight, that we have the things that we are seeking. Even if the sense of them, or the actual deliverance, has not reached us, we find that our faith already possesses them; and we can wait comfortably with the feeling that the transaction is completed and the full corn in the ear will come in due time.

The thoughtful reader will thus perceive that thanksgiving and praise may well occupy a larger share of our devotions than they usually do; that so far from losing by this seeming neglect of our own interests, we are on the contrary taking the quickest method of furthering them. We seek first the glory of God; and if our supreme interest be the glory of God, then He will see to our interest. If we forget ourselves in seeking Him, He will remember us and ours. "He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it."

Yet petition must fill a large space in our daily supplications. Our wants are many and pressing, and we cannot keep them to our-

selves; we must pour them into the bosom of our Father. If He is nearest and dearest to us, and in closer fellowship with us than any human being, we cannot help telling Him all, even our inmost thoughts and desires.

“Speak to Him, for He heareth,
Spirit with spirit may meet :
Closer is He than breathing,
Nearer than hands and feet.”

Then we are sure that He will not misunderstand us. Christ is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, having been in all points tempted like as we are. We are equally sure He is able and willing to help us. Is anything too hard for the Lord? And what He is able to do, that also He will do. Instinctively, therefore, we ask God to help us, and cannot but believe that the help we ask will in some way be granted us.”

But we are not left to our own instincts here, for we are expressly enjoined to make known our requests to Him. We are abundantly warranted, both by precept and example, to ask, to seek, to knock, to call upon Him, to call for Him; yea, to call upon the Lord, and to cry unto our God, and He will hear our voice out of His temple, and our cry will come before Him, even into His ears.

But what shall be the matter of our secret cries? Are there any restrictions laid upon

us? What trifles sometimes afflict us and cause us anxiety! The things that often trouble us most are matters which we could not tell to others and matters which we feel ought not to overshadow our spirits as they do. We are ashamed to speak of them even to our God when there are so many causes eternally important which ought to claim our constant thought.

Here let us consent to be humbled. We ought indeed to live in an altitude so high that the clouds which are born of the damps of this world should not be able to reach us. What right have we to fret about say the unkindness or the malice of men, when the men of Macedonia, lying under the bondage of sin or idolatry, are crying, — Come over and help us? How can we weep over a disappointed hope, when we see men around us led captive by Satan at his will? In this light many of our cares and anxieties and sorrows humble us and put us to shame. And yet they are here. We cannot be altogether rid of them. They belong to our mortal state; and so long as we are in the world we must be subject to its conditions. This body is intended to be the body of our humiliation. We cannot be angels, pure spirits; and the dream of the ascetic who proposes to rise above all sublunary instincts ends invariably in a deeper degradation.

But though it is humbling to the pride of humanity to be thus encompassed by petty cares, it is ineffably consoling to remember that God knows them all, and has made provision for their being poured into His ear. When our Lord tells us to pray "Give us this day our daily bread," we have warrant enough for spreading our earthly anxieties before Him. What can be more commonplace or earthly than our daily bread? Yet our daily bread is not beneath our Father's care. Moreover, commonplace and earthly as is this need, it is in truth the instrument, the implement, of our daily service. Unimportant in itself, it thus becomes of first importance. Without it where were anything else?

And thus it comes to pass that things seemingly trivial have relationships which elevate them into positions of supreme moment. And becoming of interest to us, they become of interest to Him that loves us. The smoothing of a pillow is in itself a trifle; but to the invalid that may mean refreshing repose, and the loving watcher will on that account perform this little act of kindness. And so many movements of our lives are to all appearance as trifling as the smoothing of a pillow, but they may in reality have a far-reaching significance, and thus become important to God and to us. We may not therefore hesitate

to lay before God, and to put into His hand, anything which humbles us. He invites this confidence. And we can conclude that we trust Him only when in this filial spirit we pour out our heart before Him.

The experienced Christian, in looking back upon his past experiences, will recall with surprise and gratitude occasions upon which he lifted up his heart to God concerning things which to others would have seemed trifling in the extreme, and how yet he was comforted or delivered. It will seem astonishing to himself that he should have ventured to be so familiar with God, and still more surprising that God should have so condescended to his exceeding feebleness. But the explanation is here. Whatever interests us interests God. Whatever becomes important to us becomes important to God. Whatever strongly agitates our bosom, moves the heart of God.

By way of illustration, here is a simple story of domestic life. The maid-of-all-work in a Christian household became so insolent and malicious in behaviour that the mistress of the house, who was in a weakly state of health, was thrown into a state of nervous terror. It was essential that the servant should be dismissed, and that at once. This was a procedure which she did not object to, as it would afford her and her friends farther oppor-

tunities of persecution. This prospect conjured up before the alarmed mistress the vision of a magistrate's court, and the consequent scandal and discredit which would attach to the Christian household. There was nothing, however, to be done, but to dare all and appeal to God. The issue was anxiously and prayerfully waited, and the result was that, so far from further persecution, the offending parties were glad to accept the terms offered them, and the trial came to a happy termination. Now here was a trouble that to many would have been insignificant, and would have been disdainfully dealt with. But from the position of the household, and the weakness and suffering of the person chiefly implicated, it became a great trial indeed. It was great to them, and therefore it became great to God, and He therefore graciously interposed.

As another illustration of the same principle, let us quote a passage from one of the earlier Reports of George Müller, of Bristol—"There is a father and a mother with seven small children. Both parents are believers. The father works in a manufactory, but cannot earn more than ten shillings per week. The mother cannot earn anything. These ten shillings are too little for the supply of nourishing and wholesome food for seven growing children and their parents, and for providing them with

the other necessities of life. What is to be done in such a case? Surely not to find fault with the manufacturer, who may not be able to afford more wages, and much less to murmur against God; but the parents have in simplicity to tell God, their partner—(truly our fellowship, *partnership*, is with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ)—that the wages of ten shillings a week are not sufficient in England to provide nine persons with all they need, so as that their health be not injured. They have to remind God that He is not a hard master, nor an unkind being, but a most loving Father, who abundantly has proved the love of His heart in the gift of His only begotten Son. And they have in childlike simplicity to ask Him, that either He would order it so that the manufacturer may be able to allow more wages, or that He would be pleased somehow or other, as it may seem good to Him, to supply them with more means. They have to ask the Lord, in childlike simplicity again and again for it, if He does not answer their request at once; and they have to *believe* that God, their Father and partner, will give them the desire of their hearts. They have to *expect* an answer to their prayers; day by day they have to *look out* for it, and to repeat their request till God grants it. As assuredly as they believe that God will

give them their request, so assuredly it shall be granted."

Again, we quote another illustration from Dr Taylor, of New York—"Being in Springfield, Massachusetts, ten days ago, I saw a letter written from a Western city to a convict in the State prison of Massachusetts, by one who had been himself for some time an inmate of that jail. The person to whom he wrote had committed burglary, but was hopefully converted in the prison, and had tried to benefit some of his fellow-prisoners. His correspondent had been impressed with his words, and was wishing, after his release, to live another life. With this object he went West, but found it hard to get on. His money was gone; there seemed to him only two alternatives—either starvation or crime; but—and here I must tell the story in his own words, rude though they may seem to ears polite:—'I thought of what you once said about a fellow's calling on the Lord when he was in hard luck, and I thought I should try it once, anyhow; but when I tried it, I got stuck on the start, and all I could get off was, Lord, give a poor fellow a chance to square it for three months, for Christ's sake. Amen. And I kept a-thinking of it over and over as I went along. About an hour after that I was in Fourth Street, and this is what happened: as

I was walking along I heard a big noise, and saw a horse running away with a carriage, with two children in it. I grabbed up a piece of box-cover from the side-walk, and ran in the middle of the street, and when the horse came up, I smashed him over the head as hard as I could drive. The board split to pieces, and the horse checked up a little, and I grabbed the reins, and pulled his head down until he stopped.' He then tells how the gentleman to whom the children belonged rewarded him very handsomely, and, after hearing his story, befriended him, and helped him into a respectable situation, where he could earn an honest living, so that he is now not only a good citizen, but a humble Christian."

But if we may thus literally lay everything before God, may not our prayers become secularised, or filled with that which is trivial to the neglect of that which is spiritual and eternal? The danger is speculative, not real. The very act of prayer does in itself tend to place things in their true proportions. The trivial will be seen to be trivial, and the important will be seen to be important. Besides, the desire which at the outset filled the soul, if foolish, or such as farther reflection would reject, will die on the lips, and will cease to exist. If it still lives because there is a soul of true aspiration in it, then the water will be turned into

wine. He through whose hands all prayer passes, will translate and transfigure it, and the answer will come in a higher and nobler form than the petitioner dreamt of.

True prayer, therefore, is the soul's intercourse with God. As He is loved and trusted, there must be nothing hidden and concealed from Him. In this fellowship there must be no secrets. What cannot be brought before Him must be sternly cast away; all else must be revealed to the loving ear of our Father in heaven. "Trust in Him at all times; ye people pour out your hearts before Him: God is a refuge for us."

VI

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

THIS is a much larger petition than at first appears. We are apt to think that it is chiefly suitable on its temporal side to those who have a daily battle for the barest necessities of life. But it will be remembered that poverty and riches are comparative terms. One individual is poor and in distress, though he has an income which would seem to many great wealth ; whereas another is rich on what would seem to many a mere pittance. Yet poverty—anxiety over the question of daily bread—is popularly supposed to be the special affliction of those who are called the working classes. Alas ! it is not so. This kind of affliction is not peculiar to any class of society ; and is perhaps felt most keenly by those who, as far as outward appearance goes, occupy a comfortable position in life. How often will the man of business, whether his business be on a humble or extensive scale, find himself in dismay as he considers his liabilities ! What cares the mother of the family often has as she plans for the food, clothing, and education of her children ! Few

families, in truth, whatever be their position in life, escape altogether and at all periods of their history this particular trial.

Now, to truly Christian people this often proves not only a trial, but a great trial. The thought of not being able to look the world in the face—the thought that the name of God may be blasphemed through them—is a prospect of the most distressing character. To the worldling all this is nothing. He grows quite callous over such embarrassments. He has no hesitation in borrowing without any expectation of paying again. He has no objection to a condition of dependence, and thinks it quite a proper thing that those who are, or seem to be, in better circumstances should bear his burdens. But the believing Christian will shrink even from exposing his needs to the stranger's eye, and in silence will his cross be borne.

Now, let us suppose we are addressing some who feel this pinch of poverty, and who may perhaps be deeply exercised by this affliction. It is certain there will be among our readers those who have anxieties in this direction. For their benefit, we remark,—

First, that “your Heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things.” If He knows, that in itself is enough; for what father will fail to give his children bread if he knows they need it, and if it is in his power to give?

God's knowledge is never speculative. And that he does know, and, moreover, knew that we would be ready to harbour cares and fears in this direction, is proved to us amply by the many promises and encouragements He gives us in His Word in relation to our temporal wants. Let us look closely at a few of them. And we begin with the simple petition we have uttered since our childhood, "Give us this day our daily bread." It is Christ the Lord who teaches us to go to our Heavenly Father with this petition on our lips—a petition, you will remark, which includes the full extent of your real temporal wants. Would he, then, have taught us thus to pray if it were not absolutely certain that He would afford us that which He enjoins us to ask? Is it for a moment conceivable that He would thus allure us into the presence of God, with a promise that our wants would be supplied, and then disappoint the hopes which he had awakened? The supposition were blasphemy. Let faith fasten here; and even this may be enough to cause the burden of care to pass away. This day's bread is already at hand; to-morrow's will come, when to-morrow becomes this day.

Turn again to that most comfortable chapter (Luke xii. 22-39), where our Lord remonstrates with His disciples in all ages over those fears which are so natural to us concerning our daily

bread. He goes to Creation, and He asks whether it is reasonable to suppose that, when God gives us life, He will not give us that which is necessary to sustain it; or, when He gives us bodies, He will not also give us clothing suitable for them? He goes to Providence, and He asks whether it is conceivable that the Great Provider should give the ravens their food, and starve His own children? He goes to Grace, and He reminds us that our Heavenly Father knows that we have need of these things. He, finally, goes to Glory, and asks whether it is possible that it should be our Heavenly Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom, and refuse us at the same time what is needful for the journey thither? He gives the greater, can He refuse the less? In this delightful field of meditation let the troubled and anxious wander, and faith will so grow by the exercise that their cares will melt away like snow before the summer sun.

But some will feel that this promise, that our bread shall be given us and our waters shall be sure, scarcely covers the whole extent of their necessities. There are many claims upon us which may not be included under the head of our daily bread. There are the demands of our position, there are the claims of society, there are even the duties of beneficence. How

are all these to be met by an inelastic and straitened income? The promise, however, does not yet fail us. Our Heavenly Father has provided for everything. "My God," says the apostle, "shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Or read and meditate upon the words, still more comprehensive, "And God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work." The terms of this promise are very striking—always with all-sufficiency in all things is God able to enrich you. The word "grace" here refers plainly to earthly good. And the promise tells us that He will give us so abundantly that we shall have enough even for every good work we have in hand—that liberality will enrich us. No doubt this involves the Christian paradox, there is that scattereth and yet increaseth; but if we believe in the power, providence, and promise of God, this will raise no difficulty. Here, then, is surely a sufficient security against these faithless fears which are apt to overtake us. We do not deny, indeed, that faith will be tried—yea, sometimes severely tried. You will see sometimes difficulties before you from which there is no visible means of escape. You will not always be able to see how to-morrow and its claims

can be provided for, and you may be left without relief even to the eleventh hour. Still, though you cannot see, you can trust. Though you will look for no miracles, in the ordinary sense of the word, yet the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation. Stand still and see the salvation of God. Be not afraid, only believe.

The only possible doubt that can be suggested here will arise from seeming instances, known or read of, in which Christian people do not appear to have enjoyed the benefit of these promises. This individual failed in business; that other became a dependent upon charity; or this other was ruined. Well, we can only answer, as we do not know all the facts of the case, we cannot judge. The present writer ventures to say that every case of seeming failure that ever came under his observation was easily accounted for. In all such instances we ask two questions—

First. Has there been honest industry, upright conduct, a careful and conscientious expenditure? If the professing Christian fails in any of these directions, then he need not be astonished if to him these great promises be not fulfilled. To expect that God would bless and prosper such ways, would be to expect

His blessing upon wrong-doing, upon sin. Nay, we must live as we pray.

Another question yet remains. Has there been a conscientious liberality towards Christian objects? This is the condition upon which God has promised to bless us in temporal things. If we honour the Lord with our substance, He promises that our barns shall be filled with plenty, and our presses run over with new wine. If we honour Him, therefore, in this way, He gives us a claim upon Him, a plea which He will certainly acknowledge. He, on the contrary, who finds that he needs all for himself, and has nothing to spare, is one who is not in sympathy with God, one who does not trust God, one who does not believe in God, one who does not believe in His providence and care. The promises, therefore, are not for him. He prefers relying on his own skill and care, and God leaves him to his own devices.

We say, therefore, with the utmost confidence, to those who are troubled about their daily bread, "Be not afraid, only believe." Faith may be tried, and that severely, but it will not be disappointed; ere the knock comes to the door which intimates the demand, you will have in your possession that which will honourably meet it. Nay, there may be a time in your life when such will be

the pressure of life's cares, that you will have on your knees daily to sow in tears ; but the time will come, doubt it not in your darkest moments, when you will also reap in joy.

VII

GOD'S COVENANT WITH CHRISTIAN PARENTS

WE take it for granted that Christian parents desire the salvation of their children. We must suppose that no Christian parent could for a moment contemplate with complacency the prospect of himself enjoying the blessedness of the Heavenly kingdom, and his children left to the wailing and gnashing of teeth of the place of torment. Heaven would be largely robbed of its attractions to the Christian parent had he the hope only of a place for himself, with none for those nearest and dearest to him. Parents therefore will and must hope for and desire the salvation of their children. The common instincts of humanity, as well as the desires of the new nature, will compel an increasing solicitude towards this end.

At first, when children are young, the parents' anxiety for their future may be comparatively feeble. There is, or there seems to be, plenty of time. The pliable temper of early life, the absence of temptation, the protecting care of

the paternal or maternal hand, all conspire to fill the early years—especially to the fond and partial eyes of their parents—with promise. But when the time comes for them to leave home, or to begin the business of life, matters begin to assume a more serious aspect. The waywardness, self-sufficiency, impatience of restraint natural to youth now come to the surface, and the formerly hopeful parent is apt to be in dismay. There are present temptations to be overcome. To fall under their power is probably to be ruined for ever; or, should they escape the allurements of vice, their tendencies may be all in the direction of pure worldliness. Parental anxiety becomes now thoroughly aroused. Day after day, month after month, perhaps year after year passes on, and there is no sign; or, if at any time there seemed a cloud in the sky, the hoped-for rain did not come. This leads to earnest questioning as to whether God has given us any sure grounds to expect the conversion of the children of His people. When we labour and pray, do we fight uncertainly, beating the air? or are we engaged in a work which will certainly be crowned with success? Can we labour and pray in the sure faith that, however dark present appearances may be, faith will yet win the victory?

To this question, then, we address ourselves.

Three considerations will, we think, sufficiently answer it,—

First. Let us note, in the first place, the relationship of the children to the parents as it is laid down in Scripture. Now, here it is plain that when God becomes our God, He becomes the God of our children. The parent at least is not an individual unit like an angel; he does not stand alone. Is it conceivable that God, when He takes the parent into His company, should tell him that he must leave his children without? Nay, the plain promise, on the contrary, is, "I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. xvii. 7). This promise or, as it is called a covenant, was made to Abraham. And Abraham accepted the promise. "He believed God." But Abraham is called "the father of all them that believe" (Rom. iv. 11). "Know ye not that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham?" (Gal. iii. 7). It plainly follows from this that Abraham's covenant is ours, his privileges belong to us, if we have Abraham's faith. No one will deny this. What, then, is the promise that God makes to us? Even this, "I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." And what is the claim we make upon God, when we become His by faith in Christ? Even this, we enter into covenant with Him, not only to

be our God, but to be the God of our children. We expect not only that He will receive us, but our households with us.

This same principle underlies the whole teaching of the Scripture. It is a vein of gold which runs through the whole Bible; but here and there it comes prominently to the surface. "Choose life that both thou and thy seed may live," is a parting counsel of Moses to the congregation of Israel. How often do we read it in the Psalms, "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him; and His righteousness unto children's children" (Ps. ciii. 17). "His seed shall be mighty upon the earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed" (Ps. cxii. 2). So once more, in that Psalm which contains an enumeration of the privileges, trials, and consolations of the people of God (Ps. xxxvii.), it is briefly but expressively said, "His seed is blessed." Again, "I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." Turn again to that book of the Old Testament which contains not so much promises as observations of human life by one who knew it well—the Book of Proverbs—and read such passages as "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the

righteous shall be delivered" (Prov. xi. 21). "The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him" (Prov. xx. 7). Let us quote from the Old Testament one passage more—one which certainly belongs to the whole church, and to each individual within it—"I will pour My spirit upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring" (Isa. xlv. 3).

If we turn to the New Testament, we find the same truth as plainly and as distinctly taught. Read the great word of Peter (Acts ii. 39), "For the promise is unto you, and to your children." This is a repetition of the promise or covenant made to Abraham, and is an invitation to the parent to claim the promise, not only on his own but his children's behalf. There is again the precious text, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts xvi. 31). Let one more text suffice, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; else were your children unclean, but now are they holy" (1 Cor. vii. 14).

A thoughtful consideration of such promises will constrain us to believe that the children of the righteous ought to be partakers of the same salvation with their parents. This is a natural and necessary inference—a conclusion which it

seems impossible to deny. And however bold such an assertion may seem, it would be easy to adduce many reasons to confirm it. As, for instance, if God loves and feels a fatherly interest in His children, can anything that belongs to them be to Him objects of indifference? And if His blessing rests upon all that a good man hath, surely it will much more extend to his household. And is it conceivable that, to use the language of the eighty-fourth psalm, when the swallow seeks a nest for herself in the courts of God's house, she will be refused a nest for her young? Nay, just as God receives to His kingdom the parent and his household, so the parent, when he enters, is permitted to take his children with him.

Second. Christian nurture furnishes us with another reason for expecting the salvation of our children. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it," Every Christian parent will feel the responsibilities of his position, as entrusted with the training of an immortal spirit; and he will not be wanting in efforts to be faithful to his duties. But there is even more than this. The parent is not a mere guardian or schoolmaster, and the child is not a mere waif, handed over to the care of some responsible individual. The promises we have quoted show that the relationship is something far higher than this. The obligations of Christian nurture, therefore, are

of the most imperative description. Now, if there is planted in my garden a promising seedling, it will be my business to tend it; I have no right to expect that it will eventually bear fruit, hopeful as it is, unless I bestow on it a proper care and attention. So God gives to the parent an heir of immortality. There is no reason to doubt that he will eventually prove true to his calling—no more reason to doubt than that the seedling will form a fruitful tree. But in the one case equally with the other, will careful nurture be essential. The very fact of the exceeding hopefulness of the case makes the labour more zealous and animating. The promise is not a pillow for indolence, but a spur to exertion. And he who thus works, works in the line of God's purposes; and he may well labour joyfully, for his labour cannot be in vain.

It is beside our purpose here to indicate the methods of parental training. They are many and various. And some have found one method in a high degree successful, and some have found another. The one essential element needful for success, in any method that may be adopted, is the exhibition on all occasions, and at all hazards, of a sincerity and uprightness which cannot be challenged. Children's eyes are very keen. If there be anything of insincerity or hypocrisy

visible in the parents, they will speedily detect it. If, for instance, you forbid them something as wrong, and yet indulge in it yourself—if you enjoin anything as a duty, but have excuses for neglecting that duty yourself—or if your family prayers are plainly a mere form, which perhaps on certain occasions are omitted, and on certain other occasions attended to with great state—you are simply rendering vain any efforts you may be otherwise making for your children's good. Let them, on the contrary, see that there is a deep reality in your religion, and that will be the most effectual sermon you can preach, even though the teaching may be silent. When children thus trained go out into the world, and hear the wicked asserting that all Christian profession is hypocrisy, they will in their inmost hearts repel the insinuation with disgust; when they are tempted to evil, they will remember that their father or mother would rather go to the stake than thus swerve aside from the path of rectitude; and the purity of their early home will be a support or a terror to conscience in the evil day. Certainly no Christian parent will claim a perfect freedom from shortcoming; but children and young people are quite able to discriminate between occasional failure and habitual insincerity.

Here, then, in the second place, we have the

most solid reason for expecting the salvation of our children.

Third. Yet once more, we may, in addition to all this, found our hopes upon God's faithfulness as a prayer-hearing God. We have promises, many and precious ; the promises wait on our prayers for their fulfilment. We have duties ; however well we perform them they are full of shortcomings ; and however well performed, they are in themselves without power, save as blessed by God, and God's blessing can only be obtained by prayer. Neither can we question for a moment God's willingness to hear the prayers which ascend from the family altar for the salvation of the members of the household. We have no more reason to doubt that He will answer such prayers than we have to doubt whether He will hear us when we ask the forgiveness of our sins. We proceed in both cases upon God's promises, and they must be as absolute in the one as in the other. Mr Spurgeon, in one of his sermons, well says, " When a man has believed, there is hope that his children will be saved. Nay, there is a promise ; and the father ought not to rest satisfied till he sees all his children saved. If he does, he has not believed right yet. Why should not faith be as broad as the promise ? Now thus it stands, ' Believe, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.' I

have a claim upon God for my little ones. When I go before God in prayer, I can plead, 'Lord, I believe; and Thou hast said I shall be saved, but Thou hast not fulfilled Thy promise till Thou hast saved my house too.'"

Let us not despair, however, if the answer to this prayer be long delayed. Into the secrets of God's counsel we cannot penetrate, and it is one of the mysteries of his administration which we cannot always give a reason for, that He often delays, and long delays, the answer He has promised. Nay, not only does He sometimes delay, but the thing looked for seems to recede farther from our grasp. What tears are sometimes shed, what anguish is sometimes experienced by parents, as they see the child of many prayers only becoming more wayward at the very time their ardent prayers are ascending in his behalf. But, be it remembered, delay is not denial. This delay has its merciful purpose, and is, in fact, an answer. Your prayers are heard, and some day "speedily," in some unexpected moment, they will be fulfilled, and fulfilled all the more richly because so long in coming. God is faithful, and cannot deny himself. Ay, even if the answer come not in time for you to see it, you may go to the heavenly country in the perfect assurance that the subjects of

your importunate prayers will follow you in due time.*

The only difficulty that can be suggested here is the oft-repeated assertion that the children of good men frequently turn out in after life worse than those who have enjoyed no such advantages. Now here we, in the first place, deny the assertion. It is not so. The rule is that the children of good men become also good men. And this is true even for generations ; as witness at this day the descendants of the saintly President Jonathan Edwards. But are there no exceptions ? Who will take upon him to say ? There may be exceptions which we can neither account for nor explain. But this is only because the whole facts of such cases are unknown to us. Did we know as God knows, we could prove that there are no exceptions, and can be none, since God is faithful to His word. There are probably many seeming exceptions ; but how easy it is to account for most of them ! Let us suppose, for instance, that though the father be a man of sterling uprightness, the mother's

* The well-known Rev. Mr Grimshaw, rector of Haworth, had but one son, and he did not follow his father's footsteps. After his father's death, he has been heard to say, in his maudlin drunkenness, when riding, "This horse once carried a saint, now it carries a devil." Yet, hopeless as this case seemed, he became a true penitent, and one of his deathbed sayings was, "How astonished my father will be to see me in Heaven."

influence tends to counteract the father's example. Will it be astonishing in such a case if some of the household show early tendencies towards godless ways? Let us suppose, again, that the family piety is of such a character, is accompanied with so many inconsistencies—inconsistencies which, perhaps, the children of the household only can observe—that if we knew all we might question it altogether. Will it be astonishing, then, should these inconsistencies become in the children an open rejection of God and His ways? Yes, every observer of human life will say, “Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar.” His promises never fail; His word cannot be broken. Hold fast, therefore, this faith in the face of every discouragement and every delay, and the day will certainly come when you will say like Hannah, “For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him.”

VIII

TEMPORAL PROSPERITY

Most thoughtful Christians will admit that an intelligent and believing Christianity tends to prosperity and success. The Christian nations, and the Christian communities among the nations, are the only thriving portions of the world. Where heathenism, Romanism, or infidelity prevail, there are poverty, squalor, and vice. So invariably united are the two things that we cannot but see that the connection is that of cause and effect.

When we apply this rule to individuals, and ask whether success and prosperity equally follow the path of the intelligent, living believer, most people would be inclined to hesitate. They have known many good men who fared but poorly in this life, while they have seen many godless men surprisingly prospered. And we are inclined to comfort ourselves with the reflection that the people of God have been ever found among the poor of this world, and even that God prospers the wicked because He has no interest in their welfare.

This theory, however, which floats vaguely before our minds, is scarcely consistent with the records of human life which are given us in the pages of revelation. If Lazarus was poor, and a beggar, the family at Bethany was evidently in comfortable circumstances. The New Testament, indeed, gives us few details of personal and family life; but when we go to the Old Testament, we find that invariably the eminent saints, whose history is recorded, were men of wealth and prosperity. Abraham and the patriarchs, Job, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon, and many others, certainly must be reckoned in this category. If the normal condition of God's children in this world is one of poverty or failure, how does it come about that those whose names are given us as the excellent of the earth were far removed from this condition?

May we not venture a step further, and say that, even in our day, we discover the same phenomenon. Not that we mean that all God's children are rich in the conventional sense of the word, but is it not the rule that they are at least among the prosperous, "the well-to-do?" Take that class of society in the midst of which you move, and ask who among them are in comfortable circumstances, are able to meet all their claims, are able to provide, in a satisfactory way, for the well-being of their

households, and you will find they are mostly the people who may be described as intelligent Christians. Or who, again, are those who are a burden on their friends or the community? Are they not those who either have no connection with the Church of Christ, or whose connection is a nominal one? We do not think this can be questioned. It is an enquiry open to anyone to make, and we are not afraid of the result.

Is not this, again, just what we might expect? What reason can be alleged for supposing that a true Christianity and a want of success in life should go together? We must conclude the very opposite. All the virtues necessary for success in life are inculcated by the Gospel, and not only inculcated, but imparted in that measure in which the man yields himself to Christ. Diligence, uprightness, sobriety, and such like, are, or ought to be, qualities of the Christian; and these are the virtues which lead to success. If they are possessed by the children of this world, they do lead, in their case, to success, and how much more when they are only part of the furniture of the children of God! Even on this ground, we should expect that eventual success would crown the labours of the intelligent Christian if we had no other reason for expecting such a result.

But we have other reasons. *God is with them.* "The Lord is with you while ye be ⁺with Him," (2 Chron. xv. 2) is the law of our life. Let us be with Him, and He is with us. Now, the believing Christian is with Him. He desires to live for His glory, to do His work, to do it in His way, to do it in His strength. If, then, God be with us, we have at once the secret of all success. "The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man" (Gen. xxxix. 2). How exquisitely simple this statement is, and what a world of meaning is wrapped up in it! To the same cause—that God was with him—is ascribed the prosperity of David in all his undertakings (1 Sam. xviii. 14, 28). In like manner, when Moses exhorts the people fearlessly to face their foes, though they should be a people more than they, he gives us the reason why they should expect success—"For the Lord thy God is with thee" (Deut. xx. 1; xxxi. 6-8). So we sing—"The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge." To the same cause is assigned the defeat of the Hagarites (1 Chron. v. 20); the safety of Ebed-melech (Jer. xxxix. 18); and the deliverance of His people from the wicked (Ps. xxxvii. 40).

A beautiful modern illustration of this principle will be found in the life of President Garfield. His mother was left a widow when

he was a little boy, but she taught him this lesson in his very early years, and it became the principle upon which all his life-work was carried on. Whether as a boy he proposed to "run" a farm, or as a man to "run" the State, it was always in this fellowship with God that he prosecuted his tasks. And how marvellous the successes he achieved!

Here, then, is plainly the one great secret of success. We may be weak, unwise, destitute in ourselves of many qualities which usually lead to prosperity, but if our fellowship is with the Father and his Son, if we are in partnership with God; all that is needful must be supplied us; difficulties will disappear as we come up to them, the battle will be won before we have time to strike, and we will only have to gather the spoil.

We have another reason still—God has promised His people blessing and success. "It is He who giveth power to get wealth." "The silver and the gold are mine." He therefore can easily see to the fulfilment of such promises as—"Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." We might multiply such texts indefinitely. They all proclaim the same truth, that God promises

to give as much prosperity to His people, even in this life, as will be needful for their comfort and contentment.

These promises do not certainly mean that God will make all His children rich, in the sense of being possessors of thousands. There are some in possession of thousands who are yet poor, while many whose pounds might be easily counted are rich. They mean, and can mean only, that each in his measure shall have enough. They promise the suitable and natural rewards of honest industry and well-doing. That is all we need, and all any wise man will desire. Anything more mostly proves a dangerous gift. God loves His children too well to give them more than they can safely carry. The rule, therefore, is, that each man ought to pursue his own calling diligently and dutifully, and expect its rewards. He has as a guarantee for success, not the mere calculations of business, but the promise of his God and Father.

The reader may be still doubtful whether experience will verify all this. He may have known instances which seem to say that our assertions are pious delusions. We will grant that there is much which seems inconsistent with our conclusions; but, after all, the inconsistency is only seeming. If, for instance, the exception you could produce was only a professor—a Christian in name—then he was not

“with God,” therefore God was not with him ; he is no exception. Or if, in the instance you adduce, the person in question, though a true child of God, has for a time forgotten himself, and launches out on some ambitious schemes, be sure in some way he will come to grief. He is no exception. You may say again that you have known some professing Christian people who were manifestly unfitted for the occupation they had chosen, and therefore success was impossible. Now it is quite true that, if any man enters upon a career for which he is unfitted, he cannot expect success. But did he take counsel with God when he entered upon this career? Did he make up his mind first that this particular path of industry would suit his tastes, perhaps his laziness, his ambition, and then only go and ask the blessing of God upon his own self-will? Or if he discovers he has made a mistake, does he go back to God and own his error and seek his guidance for the future? In short—for this comprehends everything—is any man “with God,” then God is with him. If he is not with God thoroughly and heartily, then even with the fairest prospects he may utterly fail.

What shall we say of the prosperity of the wicked? This is a problem which, in every age, has perplexed the righteous. It can only be solved where Asaph solved it—in the sanc-

tuary of God. But if God prospers the wicked, that militates nothing against the prosperity of the righteous. If He gives good things in His long suffering to His enemies, much more will He give good things to His friends. Besides this, the prosperity of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked differ in quality. They are the same outwardly, but how different in reality. The blessing of God which rests on the one, but not upon the other, differentiates most widely. "The little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked." The portion of the wicked in this life, however precious and dazzling it may seem, is not one which any wise man will envy.

When, again, God promises prosperity, this must mean prosperity upon the whole. Though the tide steadily rises, it often, during the process, recedes. A steady, unbroken prosperity is more than our frail nature could endure. Therefore there will be disappointments and failures. Moreover, there will be afflictions. Why? "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." But why doth He chasten us? The answer commonly given needs explanation—because He loves us. This is true. But why does a parent chastise his child? Not to show his love surely. That would be a strange way of showing love. He chastises because the child is doing wrong; he chastises to correct his error

and to keep him in the right path. The chastisement is for correction. If the child does not err he will not be corrected ; if he errs, the parent loves him too much to leave him without it. And so God's children often need correction. They are prone to wander—prone to sin. But their Heavenly Father loves them too well to leave them to their wanderings, therefore He corrects them. “ For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.” Thus it happens that the most prosperous career is often clouded by many afflictions. There is “ a need be ” for them. There are subtle sins which, but for God's chastisements, they themselves would never discover. Job required all his afflictions to mortify his self-righteous spirit. Probably the great apostle of the Gentiles needed his thorn in the flesh to deliver him from Pharisaic pride. The afflicted themselves will mostly be able to discover why God afflicts them before they are delivered out of the furnace. All this is implied in the well-known passage—“ If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged, But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.”

Let the thoughtful reader pursue these meditations for himself, and search the Scriptures “ whether these things are so.” Meanwhile, to our young readers we would say, in the

choice of a calling for life, seek much the counsel and guidance of your Heavenly Father. Having found your place and your sphere, conduct your business diligently, honestly, and conscientiously ; honouring the Lord with your substance and the first-fruits of all your increase. Many fail here, and miss in consequence both the blessing and the promise. Then expect that measure of success which will be good for you and satisfactory to you. Remember, amid all discouragements, that you have on your side a mighty Helper who will never fail you, and your chief business will be to please Him. Should you meet with crosses and disappointments, go to Him and say, "Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me." Be "with Him," be always "with Him," and then it will be said of you as was said of Jacob's son, "and the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man."

IX

INTERCESSION

INTERCESSORY prayer meets a deep craving of the human soul, and meets it especially in the great crises of life. There are those dear to us as our own soul. We would extend to them a helping hand at all times, but when we see them in danger or in difficulty, the impulse to help is overpowering ; and, if we are compelled to stand and look idly on, our anguish is great. But we are never compelled to look helplessly on. However unable we may be, we can pray.

It is hardly conceivable that any human being should be so isolated as to be interested in nobody ; and should even there be no human ties, no Christian soul at least can be so wrapped up in self as to view with absolute indifference the lives and fortunes of those around him. More than this, in proportion as we have imbibed the spirit of Christ, in that proportion will we associate ourselves with the well-being of others.

In intercessory prayer we find an outlet for those cares and anxieties which we cannot help

entertaining with regard to others—and often the only outlet.

There is, for instance, distance. He or she in whom you may be interested may be in another hemisphere. You cannot stretch out your hand to their assistance. Your voice will not reach them. Any assistance you might be able to furnish them with would be too late ere it could find them. But ah! we have in intercessory prayer a mode of communication swifter than the telegraph or telephone. God is near to us, and equally near to them. We can send them our message through Him, and that with the certainty that no time will be lost on the way, and that it will infallibly reach the ears for which it was intended. You are here thousands of miles distant from the object of your solicitude, and yet he is instantly affected by the words which you pour into the ear of your Heavenly Father. His plans are changed, some new way is opened up to him, some friends make their appearance, and a catastrophe is averted, he knows not how or why; but the secret is nothing more than this, that you were on your knees crying in his behalf.

Again, an obstacle often even still more serious to our successfully benefiting those in whom we are interested, arises from their indisposition to be influenced by us. Not seldom is our counsel unheeded, or our assistance re-

fused. Not seldom we have to be silent because we know that our rebukes would only irritate. Not seldom prejudice bars the way. We who are most interested are sometimes the least likely to interfere with any hope of success. Here, again, but for the precious privilege of intercession, we should be compelled to stand aside and look helplessly on, though we clearly perceived that a precipice was at hand. But we have a Heavenly Friend to whom we can resort. We know He can effectually deal with the perverse spirit. His word is sufficient to still the fiercest storm. We know He has all hearts in the hollow of His hand; He can turn them whithersoever He wills. We can effectually interpose through His instrumentality. A Monica can thus control the impulses of a wayward son, and lead him into the haven of peace and holiness. How much do we all owe in this way to parents and friends! What mysteries are concealed behind the veil!

Yet again, there are those whom we would influence to whom we have no access. We can neither reach their ear, nor touch their shoulder. They move before us, and pass us by unconscious of our presence. Yet we are in some way interested in them. They may be members of the same flock in which we hold a humble place. They may be the

masters, humanly speaking, of our destiny ; or there may be something in their history, or their conduct, or in their proximity to ourselves, which excites our compassion. The reader may remember a beautiful illustration of this spirit in the prayer which Mr Shepherd of Frome found among his wife's papers after her death. Lord Byron had visited the neighbourhood, and had attracted her attention. Her compassion was stirred on his behalf, and she spoke her desires for his welfare to her God. Here then, also, though otherwise so helpless, we may yet turn the strongest tide. The Lord on high is mightier than many waters. We are in alliance with Omnipotence, and who can calculate how great things we may accomplish by our prevalency with Him?

This cry of the soul to benefit and bless those in whom we are interested, when the ordinary doors of influence are closed, and which we find amply answered in our liberty to pray one for another, meets farther with encouragement in this—that we have reason to believe that no kind of prayer is so acceptable to God, or meets with a readier answer.

To plead with God to bestow upon us the blessings we need is only human, but to plead with God to bless others, this is divine. This is to be merciful as our Father in heaven. This is to copy the example of Jesus Christ the great

intercessor. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," was the prayer of Christ even for those who crucified Him; and He commands us, in accordance with His own example, to pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us. To pray for others is, moreover, to be fellow-workers with God. His desire is to bless. And when we, too, desire to bless, we are one with God. Our hearts beat in sympathy with His. We have entered into fellowship with God and with Christ.

And it is for this reason that oftentimes to engage in the work of intercession is the shortest road to break up the stupor, the insensibility of our own hearts. We are not always in the spirit of prayer. Sometimes the wheels drag heavily, and it is a labour and a task. Let us, however, only turn aside from the consideration of our own wants and desires, and contemplate the necessities of others, and pour out our supplications for them, and the soul will awake from its torpor; faith will find its wings, and will soar joyfully towards God. That which cramps the soul and drags it to the earth is its selfishness. Now selfishness is both unhappiness and feebleness. Let selfishness depart, and the heart glows with a generous affection, and the spirit is stronger to grasp for another than when it grasps for itself.

And hence also the fact that intercessory

prayer is the most successful of all prayer. We do not read of a single intercessory prayer failing of its aim. Consider Abraham interceding for the guilty cities of the plain. How great is his request? He pleads for the sparing of the cities, for the sake of fifty righteous who might be there. Fifty righteous men would have been little better than drops in the sea to the multitude of dwellers in the vale of Siddim. In its first form it was a great petition. But this granted, he ventures farther and farther, till he comes down to ten; and even then his prayer meets with acceptance, and his request is granted him. How amazing the condescension of God, and how effectual the fervent prayer of the righteous man. What a great intercessor, in like manner, was Moses! "Let me alone," says God, "that my wrath may wax hot against this people, and that I may consume them; and I will make of thee a great nation." But Moses pleads for the idolatrous people. "And the Lord repented Him of the evil which He thought to do unto His people." Again, in another rebellion, when the people murmured against Moses, and proposed to choose another captain and return to Egypt, their leader refuses to give them up, though God had promised to make of him "a greater nation, and mightier than they." He prays, "Pardon the iniquities of this people, according to the great-

ness of Thy mercy." And the answer is given, "I have pardoned according to thy word." Another great intercessor was Samuel. The people, still stiffnecked and rebellious, had yet wisdom enough to perceive the value of his prayers, and they feared, since they had rejected him, he would cease his intercession on their behalf. "Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God that we die not," they said. And Samuel's answer shows the true man of God: "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord, in ceasing to pray for you." Again we find the injunction, "pray one for another," connected by James with the prayers of Elijah, who though a man of like passions with us, yet opened and shut the windows in heaven in his intercessions for Israel. In like manner the Apostle John tells us that, if we ask anything according to God's will, He heareth us; and then, as an illustration to us of the certainty of God's hearing, he enjoins us to ask life for the brother who hath sinned, though not unto death, and the petition shall be granted. Time would fail to tell of the intercession of the Apostle of the Gentiles. Though the care of all the Church was constantly upon him, yet he finds time without ceasing to have remembrance of Timothy in his prayers night and day; to make mention of Philemon always in his prayers; and without ceasing he makes

mention of the Roman and Ephesian Churches always in his prayers. This was the atmosphere in which he lived, and one of the secrets of his success. He did not pray in vain, nor did he enjoin the duty upon others as if a mere duty. He on the contrary confesses the benefits which he had derived from the prayers of his friends. The deliverance from the great trouble which he experienced in Asia, when he despaired even of life, he attributes partly to the help which these prayers afforded him. In the midst of his trials in Rome, he says, "I know that this shall turn to my salvation, through your prayer, and the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ." His pathetic petition—"Brethren, pray for us"—shows how dependent he felt upon the prayers of his converts, and how much he valued them as an element of success. So far from casting the net into the sea by himself alone, he ever desired thousands of invisible hands to hold it with him, and then he expected to draw multitudes of fishes to the land.

All Christians in all ages have exemplified the same faith in intercessory prayer, and have experienced its value. Any Christian biography will furnish us with illustrations of its power and prevalency. We all know how Luther by his prayers brought Melancthon back from the grave. In the life of Lavater we are told how on one occasion his wife, in great distress, rushed

into the presence of another member of the family, under the impression that her husband was at that time in great danger, and they knelt down together and commended him to God. It afterwards appeared that, in the very hour of their devotions, Lavater was in a boat, and was suddenly in the greatest peril through the unexpected visitation of one of those tempests which visit the Swiss lakes ; but the storm as suddenly ceased as it came, and thus through their prayers his life was saved. The evidence of the late Sir Fowell Buxton is often quoted as an illustration of the power of prayer over even assemblies of men. "What led to that division?" he says in a letter to his daughter narrating the story of the Parliamentary conflict on West Indian emancipation. "If ever there was a subject which occupied our prayers, it was this. Do you remember how we desired that God would give me His Spirit in that emergency, how we quoted the promise, 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not ; and it shall be given him,' and how I kept open that passage in the Old Testament in which it is said, 'We have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon thee,' the Spirit of the Lord replying, 'Be not afraid, nor dismayed, by reason of

this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's?' If you want to see that passage, open my Bible; it will turn of itself to the place. I sincerely believe that *prayer* was the cause of *that division*; and I am confirmed in this, by knowing that we by no means calculated on the effect. The course we took appeared to be right, and we followed it blindly."

We will give one quotation more, which illustrates not only the prevalency of intercessory prayer, but also the delays with which God is sometimes pleased to visit His people. A holy Christian man, in a western county, had to bear, as his cross through life, the seeing of all his children growing up without the fear of the Lord. Many and fervent were his prayers for their conversion; "but the Lord answered him not a word." At last, when his end drew nigh, he earnestly besought of God that he might accomplish that by his *death* which he had failed to do by his *life*—that his children might be awakened by "seeing how a Christian dies." His end came; his children were all present, when, instead of the peaceful and unclouded departure he had prayed for, all was darkness, terror, fierce and bitter conflict to the last. Yet this apparently denied prayer turned out to be an answered prayer. His death was the means of saving

his children, though not in the way he expected. For the spectacle of one, who was known to have lived so holily, being oppressed with fears, and subject to such bands in his death, stirred up in the minds of all his children the most solemn and awakening thoughts. The conviction flashed upon them, "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" Now was the time for the father's words to be heard, and for the angel to come for his words. Some of the children have died; some, it is believed, still live: all being vessels of honour to the God that heareth prayer.

But here we need not enlarge. Every reader of Christian biography will recall similar instances of successful intercessory prayer. Nay, every experienced Christian will recall instances in his own experience. So invariable is the rule, that what was said to Monica to comfort her concerning her wayward son Augustine, has been repeated again and again: "The child of so many tears and prayers cannot be finally lost." The prayers offered by affection in behalf of those dear to them, or in whom they take an interest, form a wall of fire round about them which drives them back from the pit of destruction.

It needs hardly to be added as an encouragement to intercession, that if all prayer has a

happy reflex influence on the worshipper, this is much more so when the prayer is prayer for others. The very enemy who is the subject of prayer becomes an object of benevolent interest; and in thus seeking deliverance for others, deliverance comes to ourselves. "The Lord turned again the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends."

X

THE LORD'S PRAYER

It is impossible to write on the subject of prayer without referring more or less largely to the Lord's Prayer.

How many commentaries have been written on the Lord's prayer! But were we to put them all together, and fill our library shelves with nothing else, the next expositor would be astonished to find how much yet remained to be gleaned; and after he had done his utmost, he would feel that the mine in which he had been digging was as far from being exhausted as ever.

The most modern remark we have seen about the Lord's Prayer is a suggestion that its name should be altered, and it should be called the Disciple's Prayer. Well, it is the disciple's prayer; but is that all? Surely this is an ill-considered attempt to limit the words of God. We might just as well say concerning any promise which particularly suited us—this is my promise. Yes it is, but it is another man's as much as yours. God himself is "my God"; but such is the infinitude of His nature, another,

and another, and myriads more, may in like manner and with equal truth say—my God. And all the promises are common property, and each one possesses them as absolutely as if none other had an equal right. No illustration of this truth will be found among earthly things. A piece of property belongs to one individual, or company of men, and belongs to none else. A common belongs to all alike, but no one can claim it all for himself—he cannot put as many sheep on it as it will carry; he must leave pasture for the others as well. But here our property is common, and yet each one is as absolute an owner as if no one else had any claim, and each one can use it to the utmost. Think over the Davidic phrase, “My God,” and you will see what we mean.

But we take a step higher than this. Not only are all things common to all the flock, but all things are common to the head and the members. This is the disciple's prayer, it is true, but it is first the Lord's. He prays it with and for His disciples. We know the objection which will be raised to this—Christ teaches us to pray, “forgive us our debts.” Can He join in this prayer? Had He any debts to forgive. How, then, could he pray, “forgive us our debts?”

Yet the truth must be that Jesus on earth often did pray in this manner. No Israelite

could have lived thirty years in Palestine at the Christian era, and joined in the common worship of God's ancient people, without making many an acknowledgment of sin, and joining in many a prayer for pardon. We can read for ourselves the psalms which were chanted in the synagogue. And our Lord was a habitual worshipper there. Well, the sins He confessed were not his own sins, but ours ; the forgiveness He asked was not a forgiveness for His own sins, but a forgiveness for ours. He owned the debts that were never his. He is the Lamb of God, that was lifted up, and taketh away the sins of the world. He so identified Himself with us, made Himself one with us, that our burden of guilt He took upon Himself, and hence His death. For this reason we still claim this prayer as the Lord's Prayer, though we find Him saying with us, "forgive us our debts."

And here is our first hint on the Lord's Prayer, that when we go to God with these petitions upon our lips, we do not go alone, we go in company with Jesus Christ. We say *Our* Father, that is, my Father and Christ's Father. True, we include all the members of His family ; but, first and foremost, we think of our Elder Brother. What consolation, what encouragement is here ! He transfers to us all His glory, and imputes to Himself all our sin.

He dresses us, we might say using a humble image, in His own seamless garments, and puts Himself at our head, yea besides us ; gathers up our broken accents ; interprets our desires and fears ; tells God often what we mean when we do not know what we mean ourselves. The trembling petitioner in the presence of majesty or justice will sometimes be possessed of an agony which is speechless ; or he will blurt out the very opposite of that which he meant to say ; or he will present his case so foolishly that he feels he is doing his best to secure the refusal of his petition. But the Elder Brother understands and translates. And hence it often comes to pass, that when the blessing comes, the petitioner is surprised, perhaps perplexed and distressed. It was not what he asked for. Yes, it was what he meant to ask, though he did not understand his own wants ; and great eventually his rejoicing will be when he discovers how perfectly his spokesman understood his necessities.

Shall we not, then, seek His company when we go to the throne of grace ? and shall we not leave to His guidance, to the inspiration of His Spirit, our praises and prayers ?

And this leads us to another benefit which Christ confers upon us by teaching us thus to pray—He tells us what things we may ask with the assurance of being heard. What an advantage

surely to know what petitions we may acceptably present, and what gifts we may expect to receive! How firmly and confidently we walk when we are sure we are on the direct road to our destination! Now here all these petitions are dictated to us by Christ. He tells us to go to our Father with these requests. He puts the open letter into our hand which we are to spread upon the throne. Is it for a moment to be supposed that He would tell us to ask what God would never give us? This would be to mock us in our misery: such conduct would be satanic not divine. Here, then, with perfect confidence, we may present each one of these petitions; and if the question is suggested to us, how we can expect that God will give us what we ask, we have a sufficient answer: we are sure we cannot be disappointed, because the Lord Himself wrote out our petition for us.

When Luther was praying, and fasting, and mortifying himself in his search after reconciliation with God, it is told that he fell into a swoon. It was the thought of his sins that troubled and terrified him. When he recovered out of his faint, an old monk brought him inexpressible comfort by repeating the clause in the creed, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." A still more effectual consolation is to be found in the Lord's Prayer. You are troubled about your sins. They are so many, so heinous, so

long persevered in, committed against such light, that you fear they cannot be forgiven. Ah! listen to the Lord. He tells you to go to His Father, and to say, "Forgive us our debts." Would He send you on a vain errand? Would He tell you to ask that which He knew would not be granted? It were blasphemy to think so. Since, then, it is He who prescribes the prayer, you cannot but ask with the assurance of a gracious answer, if you have any faith in His goodness and love.

Or, in like manner, what burdens of care do we often carry on our shoulders? And all these cares do, in some way, gather round the one question of our daily bread. Will this or that venture succeed? This or that misfortune would plunge us into unknown troubles. There is a possibility of the present source of income being dried up. And thus onward the cares of life surround us. But hath not Christ taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread?" Would He have thus taught us to present this petition unless it were a matter of absolute certainty that the request would be granted? Since, therefore, the prayer is put into our lips by Jesus Christ, we must boldly use it, and be persuaded that in some way He will keep His word, and our daily bread will be given us.

Thus all our real wants are comprehended under these petitions, and when we find them

included under any one of these heads, we have the assurance that we may present them before our Father, and they will be supplied.

Here, again, the Lord's Prayer furnishes us with additional encouragement, by teaching us to address God as *Our Father*. How seldom is God spoken of as a Father in the Old Testament! Do we find His praying people addressing Him as Father? But Christ continually speaks of His Father. It is not often that He spoke of Him under any other name. In all His prayers this was the word he used, In His great intercessory prayer He uses the word six times. In His great agony in the garden, it was still His Father on whom He called. It was the same also on the cross, for it was then He said, "Father, forgive them." Under the dark cloud which shrouded Him from His Father's face, He cried out, "My God, My God:" but before He gave up the ghost, He cried, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit."

Now that glory which was given Him, He has given to us. As He called God His Father, so He authorises us to approach Him under the same gracious aspect. He repeatedly uses the same endearing expression in the context in which the Lord's Prayer occurs. "Thy Father which is in secret." "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye

ask Him." "Your Heavenly Father feedeth them." "Your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." Certainly this implies that we receive Him, and thus have power to become the sons of God. God is the Father of all men only as He is their Creator. He is in a very different sense the Father of all them that believe. "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." To call God our Father is to have received Christ, is to have received the Spirit of Christ, is to have become the children of God by faith in Christ. But, then, the endearing appellation is ours. Christ teaches us to come to our Father. And how much does this imply? It promises a gracious ear, and a compassionate heart; and all this in an infinitely higher degree than the earthly relationship. As God's ways and thoughts are high above ours, as the heavens are high above the earth, so much greater are His Fatherly affections and ability than ours.

As a very familiar, yet true and beautiful, description of this aspect of prayer, we quote from a German author—"The children of faith, however weak, may contemplate the promises which are their precious possession. By these they can (if I may venture to use such language) compel the Lord, and bind the

hands of Him who sitteth upon the throne, even as an earthly father permits himself to be urged by his little boys and girls, when they lay hold of him and say, 'Now, papa, you have said it, and we shall not let you go till you do it;' and the father is glad at heart that the children will not let him go, and that they confide in him so truly, although, to try the dear little ones, he may make as if he were displeased, and as if he would like to free himself from their hands; yes, although it may be difficult and inconvenient for him to fulfil his promises, yet he is glad that his children urge him to do it. Not otherwise, but with greater loving-kindness, doth the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our Father, treat us: He who is rich in mercy to all who call on Him, who is never churlish, never repents His promises, and who knows no difficulty in fulfilling them."¹

It may help us farther to understand the world of meaning which is hid in this "Our Father," if we remark that it is added, "who art in heaven." When you pray, you pray to your Father—yes, but it is to your Father in heaven—therefore look up. Our souls cleave to the dust, even in our very prayers. Even when we speak to our Father, we are often contemplating the dust beneath our feet. We

¹ "Self-will and God's Will," by Otto Funcke.

are watching the motions of our own hearts, or considering the ways and means whereby our prayers may be answered ; not to say that our thoughts may be wandering on the mountains of vanity. Now the Father seeketh that worship which is in spirit and in truth. Therefore it is essential to this worship that we lift up our eyes unto the hills, whence cometh our help.

This qualifying phrase, "who art in heaven," will also be instantly recognised as teaching us reverence in our approaches to God's footstool. He is our Father, yet our Heavenly Father. We are moreover reminded of the contrast which our Lord draws between the earthly father who is evil, and our Father in heaven ; and then heaven is a region far removed from the passions and prejudices of earth. With infinite wisdom must all things be ordered there. And this is not only the seat of wisdom, but the seat of power. Our Lord had great power on earth, but He has greater power in heaven. The Son of Man had power even on earth to forgive sins ; but He tells us, "He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also ; and greater works than these shall he do ; because I go unto My Father." The limitations of time and sense hampered Him here ; but the place of power now is far removed from the restrictions of earth. If on earth, it

was an error to say, "If thou canst do anything," much more out of place and unreasonable would such a petition be now.

And thus may we not say that our Lord, by this teaching of His in answer to the prayer, "Lord, teach us to pray," puts into our hands the key to our Father's storehouse, yea, to our Father's heart. We have here both the matter of our prayers and the manner and spirit of our prayers. And when we utter it, do we think of the great things we are asking, the great ventures we have made? If we did, the amen with which we conclude would not fall so readily from our lips. We would have to take time to consider whether we meant all that we expressed, or expected to receive all that we asked; for the Amen with which our Lord teaches us to conclude implies all this. Think, for instance, of the petition, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Do you really ask God to deal with you as His debtors, as you would deal with your debtors if your power were as absolute as His? Will you say amen to that? Think again when you say, "Lead us not into temptation." Do you desire to be kept in that humble and trying position where temptation is far distant? And thus with all the petitions, when we close with the amen, this is its purport, we mean what we have said—these are the very desires of our heart. We may well

pause when we come to the closing word, that we may be sure that we have given expression to the desires of the new man. If we do so, we will often go back to them again, and weep over them, and utter them with faltering lips; and we will find ourselves able to say them only on the principle, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

The amen tries us in another direction. You have asked, but do you believe you will receive? The amen means this. Here, also, will reflection often make us to stumble. Christ says amen to every true prayer, but do you repeat it after Him? Do you say, "Yes, Lord, I have asked, and now I expect to receive?" Do you leave His footstool richer than when you approached it? Are you sure you have performed a work which is causing movements in the invisible world—movements which will be translated into causes whose effects are utterly beyond our calculation? Ah! here our amen is often at the best an anguished cry, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief? Happily even this amen of feeble humanity opens the door for the working of wonders. He cannot do many mighty works because of our unbelief. But let us learn better to say amen, and we "shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in

his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."

We must return to the Lord's Prayer in the next chapter.

XI

THE LORD'S PRAYER—*concluded*

WE are the rather inclined to dwell on the Lord's Prayer, because we fear that with some their very familiarity with it hides its importance and value. Viewed as a form of prayer, we cannot but regard it as a very precious gift. However strongly we object to forms of prayer, we do not object to this form; and we thankfully use it even as it is written. And sometimes we cannot do more. We may be so troubled that we cannot speak, but we can at least pay this homage at His feet, and sob out the Lord's Prayer. We feel if we have prayed amiss, or if we seem baffled and beaten in our supplications, in this at least we cannot mistake, we can say the Lord's Prayer. We give back the Lord His own; we give Him it back laden with our sighs and tears; we tell Him that this at least contains all the desires of the new man, even if we misunderstand them or do not know them; and these will in due time be fulfilled. Yes, often in our hours of anguish we can only say, "Our Father," and the familiar yet ever new words bring us inexpressible comfort.

This form of prayer is often the beginning of our prayer life. We do not know when we began to say it, but it grows with us as we grow. Dr Monrad says, in his "World of Prayer,"—"There is perhaps no sign by which we can better ascertain the character and measure of our inner life, than the way and manner *in which we say the Lord's Prayer*. If the words glide readily and smoothly, half unthinkingly, over our lips, it is evidence of great immaturity, of a superficial and careless spirit. They are words charged with weight and meaning. The more fully we master and enter into the spirit of the words we utter, the healthier and stronger will be our religious life, the greater the blessing which prayer will bring us. When we thank God for all His benefits and gifts, we must include the Lord's Prayer as one of the greatest—a gift that so wondrously adapts itself to all ages, all conditions of life, all characters, and which seems to grow with ourselves in intrinsic worth. If God in His grace caused us to see the light of the world among Christians, in a Christian household, we can now no longer remember the day when we said 'Our Father' for the first time, just as little as we remember when for the first time we looked upon father and mother. So much else changes and grows old, but 'Our Father' remains perpetually young; and, instead of

weakening with age, it gains in power and strength. So much else has played us false, but 'Our Father' has remained our trusty companion amid all life's changes and disappointments. They are the same words, indeed, that we say and hear again and again ; and yet how they change their character, their force, as emphasis is laid on one or the other word ! How it fits itself into our everyday wants, while remaining essentially the same—ever borne up by these opening words, 'Our Father,' ever wrapped up in them as in its true kernel. A higher wisdom we desire not than from year to year to learn to say 'Our Father' with ever increasing truth, understanding, and depth of feeling ; and with no other prayer than this on our lips, do we desire at last to bow our head. Therefore do we thank Thee, gracious God, for our dear 'Our Father.'"

At all seasons and in all circumstances, it may be appropriately on our lips, and coming from the heart it will express the desires of our hearts when our own feeble words fail us. So long as our Lord says to us, "When ye pray, say—Our Father," there can be no excuse for prayerlessness. The weakest member of the household can thus far, at least, lead the devotions of the household. And if he begin with this in sincerity and earnestness, neither himself nor his household will rest there. They

will increasingly find their wings, and in words of their own will express the desires of their souls. In private or with others we can always pray, since the Lord comes to our help, saying, "When ye pray, say—"Our Father."

But the Lord's Prayer is not only a form of prayer, but it is a pattern prayer. It is a "prayer that teaches to pray." We have already remarked how it leads us at once into the presence of our Father, as His dear children. We have remarked the guidance which we have here, the infallible guidance in the matter of our prayers. But there is another lesson we must learn here; we are taught the order or method of prayer. The natural man has his wants, his necessities, his difficulties and troubles. The spiritual man is also a partaker of the same. But the spiritual man has other desires and wants, of which the natural man is only very dimly conscious. The natural man cannot really enter into the spirit of the Lord's Prayer. It is only the last half that he understands, and the last half he can really use. He can understand the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," but he cannot understand, "Hallowed be thy name." This is beyond him.

And here are we not ready to imitate the natural man, or rather does it not show how much the natural man rules in us, that often-

times our prayers are almost entirely concerned with our present and personal wants? We forget that the centre of our life is not any more self, but God. "For me to live is Christ." We are ready to forget that now we must care not for our own things, but for the things of Jesus Christ. God's interest, not our own, must be first and paramount. And the Lord's Prayer teaches us this. We are not permitted to speak of ourselves, our wants, our sins, our daily necessities, unless we have first concerned ourselves about our Father's business. If we love, then we will care first for those we love, and then only care for ourselves. And so if we are eaten up with the zeal of God's House, as was Christ, then our own things will sink into insignificance, or at least into the second place. "Hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," will naturally come first, and only after we have satisfied ourselves in this direction shall we feel ourselves at liberty to say, "Give us this day our daily bread; forgive us our debts."

This is the order which the Lord's Prayer prescribes to us, and this is the order into which the spiritual man will naturally and increasingly fall. And nothing will so mightily help the fervency and spirituality of our devotions. Selfish desires, even when laudable, contract

and weigh down the soul. When, on the contrary, self is forgotten, and the soul is concerned for the glory of God, it mounts up with wings as eagles, it runs and is not weary, it walks and does not faint.

Here, also, it is true, as elsewhere, that selfishness cheats itself. The shortest road to attain our own personal desires is not the most direct. It is first, "Delight thyself in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart." For this it is easy to see there are many reasons. Only the man who delights in the Lord is fit to be trusted with the desire of his heart. This is a necessary qualification. To grant the desire of his heart to one who does not delight in the Lord, or whose love for Him burns very low, would be to bestow, not a benefit, but a burden and a snare. Nor is it conceivable that any loss can be sustained by our concerning ourselves first and most for the glory of God. As an illustration of this principle, listen to this story told by Mr Gladstone of his connection with the great and good Dr Chalmers. Mr Gladstone was then a young politician, but in office and influential. There was some misunderstanding attending the doctor's income as a professor in the University of Edinburgh, from which his family suffered much inconvenience. The two men agreed to take a

walk together, when the professor was to explain the difficulty to the young politician. They had their walk accordingly; but the doctor was full of one of his philanthropic schemes, in which he was anxious to enlist Mr Gladstone's sympathies. So eager was the good man over his benevolent plan, that his door was reached, and his own difficulty had never been mentioned. At last, as they were parting, he said,—“By the way, my man of business will explain to you the difficulty about the salary.” Here is an illustration of a good man forgetting his own pressing necessities in his zeal for the good of others. Was it likely that, if the politician had any heart, he would permit one so noble to suffer for his self-forgetfulness? No, we would expect rather that his zeal would be intensified to benefit the man who could be so generous. We must suppose that the same principle will apply to our Father in Heaven. John Newton somewhere illustrates the same truth in this way: The king sends his courtier to represent him, and to manage his affairs in some foreign court, and he tells his ambassador that, while he is attending to the nation's affairs abroad, he will see to his family affairs at home. Hence while that which most presses upon us may be the first cry of our hearts, it will always be wise for us to reach up early to the things of

God. He who prays—"Father, glorify Thyself"—does in reality pray for everything; for God's glory and His children's good are one and the same.

We would make one more note on the Lord's Prayer before we leave it. It will have been remarked that in the revised version of the New Testament, the petition "Deliver us from evil" has been changed into "Deliver us from the evil one." There has been much discussion upon this new rendering. We need not here enter into the reasons which may have moved the revisers to make this change. They translated the original word in accordance with its usage, and we lose nothing by this rendering. It still means deliver us from evil. But it goes farther back; it goes to the fountain of evil—the wicked one. All God's works are good. It is the action of the wicked one that makes evil among the works of God. He is "the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience." The evil one or the wicked one is a more comprehensive expression, therefore, than "evil."

But the chief gain of this rendering is, we think, this—that it reminds us that we wrestle not merely with flesh and blood, but "with spiritual wickedness in high places." It is very much the fashion to ignore the agency

of Satan, as if he had no existence, or were a mere influence. He is spoken of as a figure, rather than a personality. It was not so in olden days. We know how vivid was the personality of Satan to Luther, and how he recognised the conflict in which he was engaged, both privately and publicly, as a contest with the devil. If he was tempted to doubt or to fear, he saw the tempter behind. If popes or kings threatened him or the Church, he saw Satan moving his armies against the Lord and His anointed. If he saw dissension arising in the flock, it was the wicked one sowing tares. It is true the lively imagination of the great reformer may have led him sometimes to attribute to satanic agency natural phenomena. But other men, more deeply versed in holy mysteries, have been as ready as he to see behind the evil of the world the same dark shadow. It is only in recent days that the personality of Satan has been denied, or been permitted to fall into the background. With many he is a mere figure of speech, a method of speaking in strong language, a mere personification of evil.

It is not within our province here to set forth the abundant evidence which the Scripture affords us as to the existence and personality of the devil and his angels. He who runs

may read. Neither can we understand the experience of the man who professes to belong to Christ's flock, and yet knows nothing of the devices of the wicked one. We must take it for granted that there is here in reality no difference of opinion among truly Christian men. All will admit, in theory at least, the literality of the Scriptures' teaching on this subject. But this teaching requires to be emphasised. We need to have it distinctly before us that we have to do battle, not only with evil, but with the evil one. It needs to be impressed upon us that, just as really as we have a deliverer, we have a tempter; that, just as Christ by His Spirit can put holy thoughts into our souls, so, in as far as he is permitted, can the wicked one put evil thoughts into our hearts. As we find thoughts and aspirations in our souls which we know must come from above, since they are not the natural product of the human heart; so also we find suggestions so satanic that even in worst moods we start from them with terror, and we must recognise them as coming from beneath. And since this is so, it is well to be reminded of the fact by our daily prayer—"Deliver us from the evil one." And this will give definiteness and point to our conflicts with evil, whether without or within. We will feel that we are face to face with no mere abstrac-

tion, but with a living, personal, malignant foe. This also will constrain us the more to betake ourselves at once, under temptation, to the great Deliverer. Our strength is human, the tempter's superhuman. To engage single-handed in a conflict with him is to court defeat. We must, therefore, at once summon to our assistance the stronger than he, and then the victory is sure.

Reluctantly leaving the Lord's Prayer, we propose in our next chapter to treat of the supports of faith.

XII

ALTAR HORNS

It is the frequent and happy experience of the believer to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. His mountain stands strong. He knows his privileges and he rejoices in them. Especially he rejoices in his God as the hearer of prayer. He knows that in temptation God will hear his cry and deliver him; in trial God will be with him to comfort him; in want to supply him; in danger to keep him in safety; and in trouble to save him. In these happy moments he has all and abounds.

But alas! the day of trial comes. Let the trial be what it may. Perhaps it comes in the shape of disappointed hopes—hopes which seemed to have the best foundations. Or there may be perplexities, difficulties, entanglements in life. The trial may be personal or relative; or concern the person, the family, or the Church. God is here sovereign and wise, suiting His dispensations to the peculiarities of His child. Here now is the season which puts to the proof past boastings. When the mariner

puts to sea he boasts of the goodness of his ship, and the completeness of its equipments—he is prepared for every emergency, and is ready beforehand to welcome the storm, he is so sure of weathering any tempest. But how does he look when the tempest comes? When it comes not in fitful gusts, but with appalling fury, and lasts not for an hour or a day, but with little intermission for weeks. He soon becomes grave and anxious. He carefully examines all his appliances; and fears this and fears that, and begins to wonder whether after all his good ship can survive such a fearful time.

So it is with the believer in his long continued trials. Look at David in the twenty-seventh psalm. How boldly he begins his song—"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear." This is his note of triumph when trouble is far off. He is perfectly fearless though he sees the enemy's hosts gathering in the distance against him; he has such confidence in God. But how changed is his tone when the trouble comes upon him. What a hearse-like air is—"Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice, have mercy upon me and answer me. Hide not Thy face far from me; put not Thy servant away in anger." This is no longer

a note of triumph, but the cry of a troubled and fearful soul. And this is the path by which God perhaps most frequently leads His people. They gradually come down from the mountain on which at the beginning they stand. They descend and descend, till the valley of humiliation becomes the very shadow of death. Not that they are left altogether without consolation. Even in the dark valley through which they walk some gleams of heaven's sunshine light up, if only for a moment, their darkness, to show that God is not forgetting them. And then "the Lord repents Himself for His servants when He seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left," and the hour of their deliverance dawns.

Here is the time for earnest, importunate prayer. Sight and sense fail, and the only refuge is God. We must now look about us for supports to our faith. We must fill our mouths with arguments, we must wrestle like Jacob, we must practise the ingenuity of the Syro-phœnician woman. We must find something in God upon which we can lay hold, that we may reason and remonstrate with Him, even as in His wondrous condescension He invites us to do. It is a high as well as a holy labour in which we engage when we seek to move Him who moves all things. Let us point out some pillars upon which faith may safely and

surely lean ; some fountains at which the weary traveller may rest and be refreshed.

First: *There is the Name of God.* "Let him trust in the name of the Lord" (Is. l. 10). We understand by the name of God His manifested character. The essence of His being is beyond our comprehension, but He has revealed His nature to us, His character, His attributes. Now His name is "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." If, then, we meditate upon this revelation of His name, we will find every word suggestive of encouragement and hope. Is He Jehovah? Then He is God revealed, God in covenant, God in whom the promises have their subsistence, for He gives being to all things. Is He God—then He is God Almighty, all sufficient. Is He merciful, gracious, long suffering? then all you need may be found in His nature. He is neither like the idol god of the heathen, who can neither hear, nor save, nor deliver; nor is He the listless god of the epicurean, who is indifferent. His very nature not only possesses all we need, but prompts Him to bestow. Will He deny Himself? Will He go against His own nature? Should he fail in any one particular to be true to His name, that would be the doom of the universe. For the whole universe hangs on nothing else than the name

of God. Here surely we have a solid foothold for our faith. God cannot disappoint us, for "what would He do to His great name?"

We may pursue this point still farther. One of the attributes ascribed to God by the psalmist is that He is a God who hears prayer. "He that hears prayer" (Ps. lxxv. 2). This is an ascription of a character, of a quality. When it is said, "The Lord is good," that means that goodness is a characteristic of His, a quality, an attribute. Or when in like manner it is said, "The Lord is merciful," it is meant that mercy is His habit, His nature, a quality of His being. Equally so when we learn that God hears prayer we understand by this that to hear prayer is His nature; as it is, if we may with reverence say it, the nature of the bird to sing, the flower to bloom, or the river to run.

We say of the physician that it is his business to heal the sick; of a soldier to fight the battles of his country; or of a teacher to teach; so we may say of God, He hears prayer. It would be absurd to call a man a physician who was neither qualified to heal, nor ever answered the call of the sick. It would be absurd to call a man a soldier who never appeared in the ranks, or to call one a teacher who never taught. So equally, since this name is given to God, He must hear prayer, otherwise the name would be a delusion and a snare.

But more than this. The physician is one who has by study become a physician, and he may, for that matter, again cease to be one. But it is not so with God. His attributes are not acquirements, not arts which He has learned, not something He has won. They are on the contrary the qualities, the characteristics of His being, of His nature. There are some things which God cannot do. He cannot lie. He cannot deny Himself (Titus i. 2, 2 Tim. ii. 13). So there are some things which God cannot *but* do. He cannot but be "the Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth." He can indeed change his dispensations, but He cannot change Himself. Hence, if to hear prayer is one of His attributes, He can no more cease to hear prayer, or fail to hear prayer, than He can deny Himself, than He can cease to be holy, or just, or merciful, or even omnipotent, omniscient, infinite in power and glory.

When we say of God, this is His nature, that is equivalent to saying this is His oath. He swears by Himself. His oath reveals His inmost being. The Aaronic priests were made without an oath, and therefore were a temporary dispensation; their service was a temporary arrangement. But Christ, "this with an oath," therefore a priest for ever. That is to say, the priesthood of Christ was an outcome of God's

nature, and therefore an eternal arrangement. So in like manner we have God's oath, since it is His nature to hear prayer. Here surely is an altar horn to which we may cling with the certainty that we cannot cling to it in vain. The persevering suppliant must succeed since God is God, and being the God He is, He must be true to His name, as He who heareth prayer, to whom all flesh must come. "What would He do to His great name?"

Second: *There is Christ's Name*, which we have already referred to. We may remind God, and strengthen our own faith, by pleading this name. We know well that in ourselves "we are wretched and miserable, and poor and blind and naked"; and consequently cannot claim from God anything on our own account. But He hath given us the name of Christ. This is our warrant, our plea, our sure and all-prevailing plea.

What do we understand by the name of Christ? We understand all that Christ is, and all that He has. We understand His person, His work, His offices as our Redeemer. How precious is that name—preciousness itself (1 Peter ii. 7). It is unsearchable riches. He is "an unspeakable gift."

But more than this. The coin which is current, and which alone has purchasing power, is not only gold, but it is stamped with the

image and superscription of the sovereign. It must be acknowledged throughout the dominions of the sovereign. And so the name of Christ is not only precious in itself, pure gold, but it is the divinely appointed medium of commerce between earth and heaven. The name of Christ might be precious in itself, and yet be an unaccepted plea. We might offer something valuable to the seller in exchange for his goods, but which he might lawfully refuse. However valuable, if it was not the current coin he would be entitled to reject it. But this name is both infinitely precious in itself, and it is the ordained, the appointed medium of heavenly commerce. It hath upon it the image and superscription of God.

It is plain, therefore, that were God to reject prayer offered up in the name of Christ, He would throw contempt upon the person and work of His own Son; and He would reject His own appointed medium of intercourse between earth and heaven.

It is possible for us yet to say that, though God hears prayer, He may not hear *us* because our prayers proceed from such unclean and unbelieving lips. But where does the emphasis lie? Are we heard, when we are heard, because our lips are clean and believing?

Does the seller part with his goods across

the counter because the would-be buyer is richly attired? No; the buyer may be clothed in rags, that matters nothing so long as he can produce a well-filled purse. We may feel, indeed, when we present ourselves before God that we are in ourselves only clothed in rags; true, but we have the name of Christ; that is our well-filled purse; that is our plea. And though we ask with faltering lips because of unbelief, we may yet be sure of success, because we plead the name of Christ. Let us possess ourselves of this name. That is God's gift to us, and to be appropriated by our faith. Then we possess the key to God's storehouse; the door is ever open to us, and what good thing can be denied us?

Third: The third support to our faith is one so familiar that we need only allude to it—the *Word of God, the promises*. What a difference there is between the word of man and the word of God! The word of man is a breath of air which passes away as soon as it is uttered. The word of God, on the contrary, may be called a *thing*—solid, substantial, real, not a shadow, a vapour, a mirage. For instance, when the word of God is directed against the fortress of the human heart, its walls and battlements are broken down, and it surrenders at discretion. Let, on the contrary, the most skilful array of the words of man be discharged

against it, and the fortress is unhurt, the walls are not even shaken by the assault. Hence faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. If you possess the promise, you possess the thing, just as if you possess the bank note you possess the money. The word of God was spoken by God; it is, with reverence be it said, the breath of the Almighty. How powerful that word is we see, for instance, when He said, "Let there be light, and there was light." He speaks, and it is done, He commands, and it stands fast. Hence then if we have the word we have the thing. "Do as Thou hast said" is the cry which we base upon it; and we ask, Can God break His word? Can He go back from His promise? The thought is blasphemous. And let us add that all the promises are made over in the first place to Christ, as the Church's Head. He is the Tree, the cluster of grapes hangs thereupon. Let us possess the tree itself, and the cluster of grapes, the promises, are equally possessed by us.

Let the tried suppliant follow out these hints—for they are only hints—for himself. They will prove mighty supports in the darkest valley. They assure us beyond the possibility of question that, though God may for the wisest of reasons delay His coming to his relief, come He must. Take fast hold of these

altar horns; and if the tempter should say to him, as Benaiah said to Joab, "Come forth," he can at the worst reply with him, "Nay, but I will die here." He will find that God lifts up from the gates of death that He may show forth all His praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion.

XIII

GOD'S DELAYS

THERE is nothing so painful or mysterious in the experience of the children of God as the Lord's frequently long delay in coming to their help, in answer to their cry. If God is our Father, and loves us with His infinite Fatherly love, how can He listen to our sometimes anguished complaint, and be apparently unmoved? Not thus does the earthly father when he hears the voice of his child crying out in alarm; or not so do we when our friend sends us tidings of his distress—how we hasten at the earliest possible moment, glad to give all the help in our power. Yet you will find devout souls weeping in secret—ay, weeping bitterly, because, though they cry all day long, God answers them not. They say with the Son of Man Himself—"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Why art Thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring. O my God, I cry unto Thee in the day time, but Thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent."

This experience is not only painful in itself,

but it often implies much spiritual conflict. It tends to shake faith to its foundations. What questions will the suppliant ask! Is prayer, after all, only a devout acknowledgment of the being and sovereignty of God; a confession that He is sovereign and supreme, and must do His will regardless of any wishes we might entertain or express? Is it not foolishness to expect that any prayers of ours should be able to move the Supreme from His calm and majestic march? However much comfort we may derive from expressing our desires unto God, is it not best to take it for granted that the forces of nature and of Providence move on in their own path indifferent to any lifting up of the hands on our part, even as the machine descends to crush the human being who happens to fall beneath it? Thus may we repeat in a variety of forms the old cry—"What profit should we have, if we pray unto Him?"

Such thoughts, sweeping over the troubled soul like a tempest, awaken emotions of terror. They are like the earthquake, which shakes our faith in the solidity of the earth itself. They threaten to land us in the awful abyss of atheism—no God, no Providence, only a vision of Pyrrhonic darkness. It is told that Luther, strong as his faith usually was, once fell into this state of despondency, and took to his bed as if he could only die in despair. To

his astonishment, his wife appeared at his bedside, dressed in mourning. On inquiring the reason of her strange costume, he received as answer, by way of explanation, that as God was dead, she thought she must put on the habiliments of woe! This was enough. Now the sun shines though we may be in darkness. It is only a cloud which hides Him from us. But it is in the nature of clouds to move, to dissipate, or to descend in refreshing showers. Only wait. "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness."

That God does thus hide Himself and seem indifferent to His people's cries and fears is familiarly illustrated to us in the story of Lazarus. "Jesus," it is said, "loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." They sent Him the tender message, "Behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick." Will not the friend of the household hasten to outmarch death, or at least send a message of peace and health. He had but to speak the word; He needs not come under their roof. But no; He not only abode where He was, but He proceeded with the work He had in hand quietly and calmly as if no hearts were breaking because He came not. Imagine the anguish of the sisters, the dark thoughts of Lazarus himself, as hour after hour sped on and no sound of His footsteps, whereas death is marching on apace. And

then when they tenderly lay their brother in the grave, how dark seems not only earth but heaven, since the light that had shone upon them with such soft brilliance, the very light of life which had lately so gladdened their hearts, seemed to be extinguished. And all this pain and anguish was known to Him. How perplexing and mysterious all this seems. Yet it is often God's way. And since it is His way, our first source of comfort under this trial is—

I. To be still and know that He is God. In all extremities we must fall back upon this, the sovereignty of God. He is infinite, how can we comprehend Him? His way is in the sea and His path in the mighty waters, His footsteps who can trace? Shall dust and ashes judge the great God, and prescribe to Him His ways of working? Moreover, as sinners in the presence of a holy God, we must lay our hand upon our mouth, and confess that it is of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed; because His compassions fail not. Our attitude, therefore, in the darkest times must be that of perfect submission, saying, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

II. Another source of comfort is to be found in this, that however dark be our path, we have no reason to doubt His love. It is unchangeable like Himself. It is everlasting love. It

is sovereign love, having its reason in Himself, not in us ; and therefore varying not with our moods, nor increasing or diminishing according to our deserts. It is the love of God in Christ, that compassionate love which the Saviour exhibited towards sinners when He took from them their heaviest burden, even their sins. It is the love of God in Christ, therefore unchangeable and intense, because it is in the Head that He loves the members. And who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Can a woman forget her sucking child? They may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Let us believe therefore in His love to us, whatever sight and sense may say. Nay, we may well believe that the present distress is an expression of His love. He is good, and can do nothing but that which is good. Just as the child will believe in his father's love to him, though he cannot understand his actions, so we may hear Him saying to us in these seasons of darkness, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter;" and believe that behind the clouds is the gracious countenance of our Heavenly Father.

III. But again : not seldom may we discern reasons why the Lord delays His coming. The expression "the fulness of time" reveals to us much of the secret of God's delays. Were He to come as soon as we wish Him, His coming

would only be a signal of disaster. The processes of spring and summer must precede the harvest season. In many respects it is possible for the ardent petitioner to be unprepared for the boon he seeks. Here, for instance, is an individual who sees a position which he thinks he could easily fill, and he zealously seeks it from God. But day after day and month after month passes away, and his prayer is unanswered. Eventually, after long waiting, it is put into his hands. But why all this long weary delay? Sometimes such a petitioner has discovered that at the time he first sought the position he had not health sufficient for its duties, and had he obtained it according to his own desires, he would have gained only immediately to lose, as he would have been found unfitted for the work expected of him; but the waiting time sufficed to give him the needed health and strength. Will he think now, as he looks back upon his experience, that his Heavenly Father dealt hardly with him when He was so long silent? Nay, he will admire and praise Him for His wisdom and His love. And thus will the thoughtful Christian often discover afterwards that the loving kindness of God was strikingly manifested by the delay which at the time was so painful. And as there may be thus temporal difficulties which require time for their removal, so also the faith requisite for the be-

stowal of the answer may be wanting. What more earnest petition could be presented than that by the father of the lunatic child? Why doth the Lord delay the answer? Just because of the petitioner's unbelief. Faith had to be born and struggle into strength before the needed boon could be given. It was not that the Lord was unable; neither was it because He was unwilling. He was not indifferent to this man's anguish; but He suffered it and restrained Himself, because only in this way, in the way of struggle and trial, could he reach up to the faith which could receive at the Lord's hands all that he asked. Hence the waiting time is usually a time of growth. And when the fullness of time comes Christ appears. The suppliant sees things very differently at the close of his struggle from what he did at the outset; and the blessing so ardently sought becomes now a real blessing from his being thus prepared to receive it.

IV. It will follow from this that when our prayers are offered up for blessings for others, they too, at that time, may be unfitted to receive them. You pray for the conversion of your friend, and you hope that some day soon he will at one bound pass into the kingdom of Christ. The process, however, may be very different. Your friend, who is the subject of your prayers, may be immersed in worldliness.

He may be permitted for a time to pursue the path he has chosen, till some catastrophe comes ; his earthly ambitions are wrecked ; now is he prepared to listen to your counsel. In that path in which God was leading him, God was answering your prayer. Or, yet again ; you would fain that your friend should in some direction change his mind. He is in serious error, or he is opposing a cause to you sacred and dear ; or is he a stumbling-block, in your opinion, to others ? You are impelled by the importance of his position and your desire for his well-being, to ask God to change his mind. The answer does not come : instead of his reviewing his position, he embarks in it more zealously, and you are in despair. Wait, and the day will come when you will rejoice in answered prayer ; the path he is pursuing is the very path in which he will most surely discover his errors, and lament his mistakes. God was taking the most effectual method of answering your requests. Thus, God requires time. He is hearing all the while, and taking the most effectual steps not only to answer, but to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.

V. Again ; as it is with human souls, who cannot, without a miracle, be in a moment transformed from childhood to maturity ; there must be in all mental and spiritual processes,—

First, the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear; so it is with the constitution of things. Sometimes before prayer can be answered, many things must happen. When the Indian Mutiny, to use a familiar illustration, broke out, and the tidings reached the home Government, instant preparations were made to come to the help of our beleaguered countrymen, and soon the ocean was whitened with the sails of a fleet hastening to their aid. But in those days there was no telegraph to flash the news of speedy help; moreover, three months must elapse before the thousands of miles of ocean could be crossed by the eager bands who were prepared to fight for their kindred. During this long period what anxieties must have been endured by the English garrisons! But would they suppose that because they had no answer to their appeal for succour, there was no help coming, or that the authorities at home were indifferent to their fate? No, they had faith in their country, and knew that as speedy a response as possible would be sent to their cry; and they could only wait till, in the nature of things, relief would arrive. We have an illustration of the same principle in the experience of Daniel. "From the first day," said the angel that touched him, "that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard." The

words of Daniel were heard in heaven as soon as they were uttered on earth. But one and twenty days pass away before the answer reaches him. Why was this? "The Prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me." There was a battle to be fought in the invisible world before Daniel's prayer could be answered. The messenger who was commissioned to fly swiftly to meet Daniel's petition was interrupted on the road, and hence the delay. We may not be able to comprehend all this ; we cannot look into the invisible world and view the processes which are proceeding there ; but it plainly tells us that if there is delay, the answer is yet coming, and coming as speedily as the nature of the case will admit. Here then is a call for trust. Have faith in God ; and believe, though you cannot see, that He is hastening to fulfil your desire.

VI. It only remains for us to add the familiar remark, that delay implies always two things when rightly improved—First, that the gift when it comes will be richer ; and second, that the suppliant will be permanently lifted up to a higher level through the conflict. If you are content to wait till the fruit is fully ripe, the sweeter and more nourishing will the fruit be. And the new experience will make the petitioner a new man ; no more a mere wrestling Jacob, but a prince having power with God and with man. Well, therefore, may we be satisfied

to wait God's time, when so rich is the recompense.

However painful, therefore, this experience, let us remember the Master's word to pray, and not to faint. If you are leaning upon His promises, you are asking according to His will, you are asking what He wills to give. It is because His patience, "His long bearing," is so great, that He delays His coming. He is, indeed, in haste to come, but His love restrains his footsteps. That the fruit may be fully ripe, that the fulness of time may come, is the reason why He hastens so slowly. But the importunate prayer will not only bring the answer, but will hasten its progress. Every faithful prayer you present before Him, brings you nearer the goal. "Shall not God avenge His own elect which cry day and night unto Him? I tell you He will avenge them speedily."

XIV

THE ANSWER DELAYED

WE do not discuss the question of unanswered prayer, because we cannot find that there is such a thing. No doubt men may utter words which are called prayer, and there may be no response. But real prayer must always be answered—answered in some way, answered at some time. Our prayers cannot lie in His presence like letters on the table of a busy or neglectful man. He never said to any son of Jacob, "Seek ye Me in vain." In all labour there is profit, and this labour of prayer must be the most profitable of all toils, when the soil in which we sow is God. We do not read in Scripture of a single unanswered prayer offered up by any of His people. It is true the special petition was sometimes denied, but even then it was granted in some higher form than the suppliant dreamt of. Even though Moses, so habitually successful in his supplications, was denied in his request to go up with his people to the promised land, yet how wondrously was his prayer answered. Not only was he permitted to see the inheritance of Israel from the

top of Pisgah, but ages afterwards he visited it in the company of Elijah, and stood on the Holy Mount with Jesus Himself. Who then can venture to say that the prayer of Moses, which seemed to be denied, was overlooked or forgotten. Therefore we assert that there is no such thing as unanswered prayer, and that when prayer seems unanswered, the answer is only the more wonderful and glorious.

Unanswered prayer! how is such a thing possible? God calls Himself the hearer of prayer. He has given the promise, "Every one that asketh receiveth." He has unveiled to us His very nature when He has given us not only His promise but His oath. He abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself. "He is not a man that He should lie, neither the son of man that He should repent. Hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" Were He to break His word to one of the meanest of His creatures, the universe itself would fall into confusion. It reposes on God's faithfulness; and were His faithfulness to fail, what angel could be sure of his place, or what law could we trust for a day or an hour? That day when God should change, or break His word, or fail to fulfil His promises, or put to shame any that trusted in Him, would be the blackest day the universe ever saw. It would

be the end of all things in a sense far beyond the conception of man or angel.

In dealing, therefore, with the question of the Answer Delayed, we put altogether out of court the supposition of the Answer Denied. But we must also exclude from our present discussion the Answer Transformed. We not only admit, but rejoice in the fact, that the return of prayer may not be in the form the petitioner expected. The apostle prayed thrice that the thorn in his flesh might be removed from him, and was no doubt surprised and perplexed that no answer was vouchsafed to him. But the answer came, though in another guise than he anticipated. David fasted and prayed for his child, but its life was not given in answer to his cry; yet his child was his still, for he could say, "I shall go to him;" and Solomon was given him in addition. And this principle is often visible on a large and extensive scale. We read, for instance, in a recent noble missionary autobiography, a story of a seeming complete failure of missionary labour of the most heroic character. The missionary was highly qualified, devoted beyond most men, and endowed with a faith which in the midst of perils and discouragement never failed. He laboured, he suffered, amidst heart-breaking sorrows, in deaths daily, in prayer without ceasing, and, in the end, so small was the

result of his toils and trials that he had to forsake his terrible post, barely escaping with his life. Did not this man pray for the conversion of the heathen? Yes, more earnestly and continuously than ever human being prayed for his life. But his prayer was not answered? Yes, it was, but not after the fashion he himself anticipated. Yes, the harvest has been rich as the sowing was of the most costly kind. The battle with Satan was eventually won on the same spot where for a time he triumphed; and the servant of God who was so tried was thus prepared for a world-wide mission, whose results in the isles of the sea, in the continent of the Southern Hemisphere, and in Great Britain, eternity alone can reckon.¹

Thus, also, it not seldom happens that the prayer is translated into another tongue. An answer richer and farther reaching than the petitioner dreamed of is given. And though faith is often in this way painfully tried, who will quarrel with God for thus interpreting the secret desires of the Spirit? God's gifts in answer to the prayers of His people are in such ways as these, often exceeding abundantly above what they ask or think.

This, then, is an answer not denied but delayed. And here is one reason for the delay—even that the answer may be richer,

¹ The Autobiography of John G. Paton, D.D.

that there may be time and opportunity for the bounty of Jehovah.

Our horizon is very narrow. We see before us something which we can, with every divine encouragement, pray for, and we ask. The thing is good, we cannot discover any flaw in our desire. Therefore to-morrow we expect the gift will be ours. But, ah! God may mean to give us greater things. We ask for a crumb, but God means to give us a loaf. The crumb would satisfy us for a moment, but the loaf will last us perhaps a lifetime, or at the least forty days and forty nights during the long journey which is before us. Let not the tried petitioner therefore despond, though for long he seems to pray in vain. God means to give him some greater thing than he asks for. The vessel may be longer at sea than he calculated upon, but the reason is because it will return with a richer and larger burden. In the meantime he will not be forgotten. The return is so sure that he may revel in the anticipation of his coming riches. It is even possible that his waiting days may be happier than his days of enjoyment. Leave God to His own time and way, and be assured that all will be well. "They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me."

There is another method of procedure which God often adopts, that may be the explanation

of present delay. The promise seems to die, and be buried. Abraham received the promise of a son, in whom, as his seed, all the nations of the earth should be blessed. But the fulfilment was delayed till nature said it was impossible. And yet again, the promise being fulfilled, he was called upon to offer up Isaac, "of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called," and from the dead, as in "a figure," he received his son. David was promised the throne of Israel, and had the promise sealed to him by the anointing of Samuel. At the outset of his career he was brought into connection with the court of Saul, he became a courtier, and one of his captains. He might have hence concluded that his way was being made plain for the fulfilment of the promise. But, alas! the fulfilment was every day put farther and farther away. He became a fugitive, and was hunted like a partridge among the mountains. His life was daily menaced. So utterly did the promise depart from him that he took refuge with his country's enemies. He had gone to sea anticipating a prosperous and speedy voyage; and lo! the winds and storms drive him farther and farther away from his haven, and he despairs ever reaching it. Yet this was the way God chose for him to arrive at the promise given him in his early days. It was not a short road, but since God

chose it, it was the best road. When he came to his throne, he was rich in experience, he was rich in faith, well armed and equipped for the great niche he was to fill in the history of the chosen people and the world.

The tried petitioner need not therefore despond even though the fulfilment of his prayer is not only delayed, but the hope of its fulfilment seems to recede farther and farther. He is a God that doeth wonders. His way is in the sea, His path in the great waters, and His footsteps are not known. Judge Him not by feeble sense. His ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts. This only we know, that "no word from God is void of power." His promise breaks through every obstacle, and even if it is buried it will rise again. "Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him."

With a few simple and elementary truths must the tried suppliant meanwhile animate his soul to faith and patience. However mysterious and dark may be present dispensations, yet certain things must remain true. We repeat them again.

God, for instance, cannot cease to love. Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. His love must be unchangeable

like Himself. The sun must be shining, though the dark clouds may hide his face. Again, though the suppliant often cries :—"Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope," God does not forget. "Thou shalt not be forgotten of me." If He has graven His people upon the palms of His hands, and their walls are continually before Him : they are not for a moment out of His sight, or beyond His care. His memory is not limited by the finitude which belongs to us. Each one is as much the object of His thought and consideration as if there were none other existent in the universe. Each one can say—"My God ;" and if we can say "My God," we can say further—"My God will hear me."

Moreover, He is hearing all the time, though as yet the seed of prayer has not risen above the soil. Think for a moment how difficult it would be to believe he did not hear. To say that he did not hear the prayers of His people would be to say that the Bible from beginning to end is a tissue of fables ; and that is what they openly assert who deny that God hears prayer. To say that God does not hear would be to give the lie to our Lord Himself, who teaches this truth in the plainest terms. To say that prayer is vain, would be to contradict the recorded experience of Abraham and the patriarchs, of Samuel and the prophets, of Job,

and Hannah, and David, and Elijah, as well as the apostles and teachers of the New Testament. To question this truth would be to question the experience and testimony of ages, and of the holiest men of every generation. No fact can be established on surer evidence ; and he who doubts here ought to doubt every fact of science, and everything which all men believe.

Therefore however perplexed and distressed the petitioner may be, he is shut up to this faith. He cannot help himself, whatever his experience be. And let him listen to the Lord, who spake the parable to this end that men ought always to pray and not to faint, and at some time, and in some way, he will be able to say of himself, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles."

But why, oh why is the Lord so long silent? Ah! there is one reason which is apt to be overlooked—is the petitioner brought low enough? It still remains true that "the Lord Himself shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants, when He seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left." It is when men are brought to their "wit's end" that they really cry unto the Lord in their trouble. But this is a difficult lesson to learn. There is still some resource or some

resort dwelling far back in the thoughts of the suppliant, perhaps unconsciously, should God fail. You lean upon Him, but should He prove an insufficient support, you have something else as a last resort. It is not "Lord, save me, I perish," but it is "Lord, save me, but if not, I do not mean to perish, there is something yet which I mean to do if Thou shouldst fail me." It is easy to see that here is a fatal flaw in sometimes the most ardent prayer. God cannot hear such prayers. He who thus prays makes God to be only one of other gods whom he will try one after another. It was not thus with Esther when she said, "If I perish, I perish." It was not thus with David when he said, "If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and show me both it and His habitation; but if He thus say, I have no delight in thee, behold here am I, let Him do unto me as seemeth good unto Him." Trust in God must be absolute trust. It must be a falling into His hands, and letting every other confidence go. There must be no door open for retreat, the ships must be burnt; there is no armour for the back. But here is a hard and difficult lesson to learn. Often it takes long and severe discipline, a long process of emptying from vessel to vessel, before there is this surrender of every hope but that which is founded upon God. Not seldom has God to blight these

other confidences utterly, and take them out of the way, before we are shut up absolutely to Him. This explains many a trial and many a bereavement.

If, then, you would have God hear your prayer, and hear you speedily, learn diligently this lesson of your own helplessness, and the helplessness of the creature. Nothing is too hard for the Lord, but everything is too hard for man. It is time for the Lord to work, only when man gives up in despair his own endeavours, and loses all hope in his own wits. Then the valley of Achor becomes a door of hope, man's extremity becomes God's opportunity. And this rule holds good in all things. It holds good when we first seek salvation, as well as in all after trials. It is when the seeker discovers that he cannot save himself, or contribute anything towards his own salvation, that he falls helplessly into the hands of Jesus Christ, and then his salvation is begun. It is so also in all after trials with him who knows how to say, "Lord save me, I perish."

XV

THE CLOUD LIKE A MAN'S HAND

At the risk of repeating what has already been elsewhere written, let us return for a little to the subject of God's delays. Here we fancy line upon line will be welcome, at least, to the sorrowful soul. The waiting time, the interval between the petition and the response on the part of God, is often a season of pain and anxiety, and leads to the question whether God does listen to the prayers of men, and whether it would not be better to cease a habit which seems to produce no results. The need for which help is implored, we may suppose, is present and pressing. Unless speedy assistance come what consequences may ensue! If we only knew that the answer was on the way patience would be easy, and hope would animate to perseverance. Daniel was on his knees for full three weeks. "He ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in his mouth, neither did he anoint himself at all." He was manifestly filled with anxiety, and was day by day on his watch-tower looking for an answer to his prayer. What comfort it would have

been to him had he known that an angel was on his way to respond to his cry! He could have waited then calmly and patiently. But not knowing this, we may not wonder at his prayers and tears. The long silence is especially distressing when the petitioner cannot discover any flaw in his petition, or anything doubtful in the spirit in which it is presented. The calmness and confidence with which the season of prayer was entered upon are apt to be exchanged for utter despair.

Are there any clouds to be seen in the sky which would in some measure remove this painful tension? There must be. How often do we find the psalmist beginning his prayer in tears and groans, and yet before he rises from his knees he ends by singing, "The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping." "Blessed be God which hath not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me." Whence this confidence? How comes it that the psalmist is able to bless God for the answer to his prayer when that answer is still invisible?

To this question let us now address ourselves.

I. The first and most obvious source of this amen, which in this case is "a testimony of the desire and assurance to be heard," is the name and the promise of God. One of God's names is—He that heareth prayer. We have also

numerous promises to that effect. He cannot deny Himself or cease to be what He is. He tells us that He never said to any son of Jacob or to any true seeker, "Seek ye Me in vain." He has, moreover, given us the name of Christ as an all-prevailing plea. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." Unless then we are prepared to question God's veracity, unless we can believe that He can go back from His Word, we can have no reason to fear that our prayers will be in vain. It will, indeed, on all hands be admitted that there will be prayers which will not be heard; that there will be petitioners who will receive no return of their prayers. That only proves that there are prayers which are no prayers, and that there are petitioners who are not sons of Jacob. But these are the only conceivable exceptions to the universal law. However painful therefore be the waiting time, let the sincere seeker follow the counsel of the Lord Himself, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

II. A second consideration, which leads to the same conclusion, is furnished us by such promises as—"This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us." In most cases, in very many at least, we may ascertain whether that which we ask is in accordance with God's

will. By promise, by inference, or example, we may with certainty satisfy ourselves whether what we ask is in accordance with the will of God, and will be glorifying to Him. Then it is certainly promised that all such petitions will be granted us. It is a promise this also which reminds us that hearing and answering may not be contemporaneous. The interval between Daniel's prayer and the answer thereto was full three weeks. The united prayers for the deliverance of the apostle Peter out of the hands of Herod were continued unto the very eve of his expected martyrdom. And the experience is quite familiar. Days, weeks, months, even sometimes years, intervene between the first petition and the final answer. Sometimes even the answer is received only on the other side of the grave. But none of these things need move us or cause us to despair of a full and abundant acceptance of our prayers. On this ground again we may "quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."

III. This leads to a third consideration, which still more assures us that though the answer be delayed, yet the answer is on the way—even this—if the petitioner is enabled to continue his importunities. Here the rule is, that when we ask what God sees fit to withhold, the request gradually dies on the lips, and the thing which is sought ceases to be an object of desire. It

seems as if God were unwilling to disappoint his children. It pains Him, shall we say it with reverence, to refuse them anything, just as the parent suffers when he has of necessity to refuse the request of his children ; for like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him. Therefore it is that perhaps unconsciously and unknowingly the supplication ceases to be made. The desire dies. No reason may the petitioner perhaps be able to give why he has ceased thus to pray. He finds, however, that his lips are sealed, and he is satisfied to be without that which he at first so eagerly sought.¹

It follows from this that when with unwearied importunity the cry, so far from dying away, is pursued with increasing eagerness, the answer is on the way. As in the experience of Daniel, the angel is being caused to fly swiftly, laden with the coveted boon. "In the day when I called Thou answeredst me," but how?—"Thou didst encourage me with strength in my soul." That is to say, he did not receive the gift for which he prayed on the day on which he called, but he received strength and encouragement to wait on. He then who is enabled and encouraged to continue his suit, he who is able to say, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me," may be assured that the cloud no bigger than a

¹ Jer. vii. 16 ; xi. 14 ; xiv. 11. Deut. iii. 26.

man's hand is over his head, may be assured that the day will dawn when his mouth shall be filled with laughter and his tongue with singing. He may be assured that the argosy, which had such a long voyage, will return laden above that which he asked or thought. The return of his prayer he will find was worth waiting for, that though the delay seemed long and protracted to the eve of catastrophe, yet the time as well as the gift will bear ample tokens of the wisdom and goodness of God. Cowper's simple lines will occur to the reader—

“Wait for His seasonable aid,
And if it tarry, wait ;
The promise may be long delayed,
But cannot come too late.”

IV. The delightful experience of Hannah is not unknown to the children of God, and here we have another token of accepted prayer, and of the answer in due time. “So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.” “She had prayed unto the Lord and wept sore.” She vowed that the child she asked God to give her would be dedicated to the Lord all his life. Then, as she rose from her knees, she found her burden gone. She was at peace. She was no more sad. Nor is this experience uncommon. The petitioner cannot explain the change ; only he knows that he began his applications amid anguish and

tears, and suddenly his sky becomes bright, and his melancholy wail becomes a song of thanksgiving and praise. He is already in the enjoyment of the benefit he prayed for, though there is no change in his external circumstances. Faith is the substance of things hoped for. He has received no telegraphic intimation that his venture is safe, or that his son has recovered from his deadly sickness, or that his enemy has become his friend, or that his feared calamity has passed harmlessly by. Only, he is assured that all is well. Thousands of miles may lie between him and the object of his solicitude. Months may intervene before the visible answer to his prayer can reach him. Yet, though he may have occasional visits of fear, he will hold fast to his conviction that his prayer is heard. Nor will he be disappointed. The day will come, sooner or later, when he will sing—"Blessed be God who hath not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me."

V. In enumerating the gracious intimations which God sometimes vouchsafes to His waiting people may be reckoned unusual visitations of the spirit of grace and supplications. It was thus with Daniel when he knew by the books that the time was at hand when God would visit His people. There were great events in the near future, and still greater events in the far distance. Simultaneously with the approach

of these times Daniel "set his face," it is said, "unto the Lord God." Though habitually a man of prayer, he had evidently at this time an access of the spirit of grace and supplication which led him on till the future was unveiled before him, and he was able to predict with absolute accuracy things to come, doubtless to the guidance and comfort of his fellow-countrymen. This also is an experience of the prayer-life which is by no means uncommon. Without knowing why, the spirit of grace and supplication so moves the soul of the favoured individual that he feels he must pray, that he feels it difficult to refrain from the formal act, that he feels as if he must literally obey the injunction — "Pray without ceasing" — and he is happy only when he is on his knees at his Father's footstool. Here is a sure sign that some important events are in the womb of time, and will soon be born. Not perhaps to-day or to-morrow will this singular experience be explained. But the time will come when he who is thus intimate with his Lord will discover with wonder and gratitude how true it is that "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He shows them His covenant."

VI. It may be added in this connection that sometimes the Lord recalls to mind as

a sign of His approach some text of Scripture, some text whose bearing may be altogether dark at the time to the suppliant to whom it is given. It must not, indeed, by way of caution, be forgotten that texts, proverbial sayings, or impressions may take hold of the mind from causes which have no definite relation to any intercourse with God. Snatches of song will hum in one's ears, airs will haunt the memory, even words will seem to be spoken into the ear which plainly do not belong to Christian experience. These mysteries must be left to the consideration of the psychologist. They are phenomena which it is his business to investigate. But whilst we may be warned against deceiving ourselves because some impressions have been borne in upon the mind which are outside religious experience, yet that God does thus sometimes speak to His children cannot be doubted. He who made man's mind can communicate with man's mind, can show Himself as the living and present God, even now as of old. Thus it sometimes happens that in the midst of our prayers the promise will enter our hearts as God's amen to our petitions. Even as in other intimations, the time may not be at hand when the promise will be fulfilled. Many events may take place which seem to drive the vessel farther from the port. Nevertheless the

day will come when it will be said, "Immediately the ship was at the land whither they went."

Such were some of the intimations which God sometimes gives, especially to His tried and afflicted people. Let it be added, however, by way of caution, that we must not spend our time in seeking signs, or continue our supplications only when such intimations are made to us. Nay, God is sovereign. There may be nothing which we can recognise as a sign, and yet the answer may be at hand, and in due time revealed. Our duty at all times, especially in times of trouble is, as John Foster was in the habit of saying, to believe, hope and pray. Nor ought we to be dismayed if while we pray we can perceive no token of acceptance. We walk by faith, not by sight. God promises to hear prayer, and that is warrant enough both for prayer and for faith, even when there are no encouraging clouds in the sky. It is ever true that we ought always to pray and not to faint. "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform," but our steps must not be ordered by divine secrets, but by the things which are revealed.

From all this we may learn how gracious is our God, how He even counts the sighs and tears of His children, and is moved by

them. The wonders of electricity which our age seems far from exhausting—the wireless telegraph, the phonographic machines, and other marvels of science excite our astonishment. But how far surpassing the marvels of science are the marvels of God's intercourse with His children. The feeblest cry of the feeblest of the sons of Jacob reaches the ears of God more speedily than the swiftest telegraph, and sets in motion agencies which are alone under the control of the God of Creation, Providence and Grace. Have faith in God. "What great nation is there that hath a God so nigh unto them as the Lord our God whensoever we call upon Him."

XVI

NOT A BONE BROKEN

THE experience which we have been considering in the two previous chapters is one so common and so perplexing that we must return to it again in the hope of affording still further help and consolation to the tried and afflicted believer. "Waiting" is not seldom a painful and even terrible experience. Affliction comes at first, mayhap, in some gentle guise, and it stirs to prayer, and the suppliant expects that it will speedily pass away. But instead of this, to the surprise and perplexity of the sufferer, the furnace becomes hotter and hotter; and at length it threatens to consume not only the withes that bind him, but to overwhelm him in irresistible calamity. It was thus with David when he said, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul." It was thus with Job as he sighed for the day of his release. The experience is similar of those who have set themselves to pray for some needed boon. The wayward son for whom prayer is daily offered in anguish and in tears, instead of returning to the God of his fathers, wanders

further and further away ; and any moment the hope which has been cherished regarding him may become altogether extinct. Witness Monica praying for Augustine ; and when she learns that he proposes to sail for Italy, feeling that all is lost, and then entreating God, as her last hope, that his journey might be prevented—a prayer which, in the literal sense, was not heard.

At such seasons as these, deep calleth unto deep at the noise of God's waterspouts. At such seasons as these the words come to the lips, "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will He be favourable no more? Is His mercy clean gone for ever? Doth His promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?" What fears of coming calamity terrify the soul! The evil which has been dreaded and striven so long against is certain to come. The name of God will be blasphemed and men will say, "Where is now thy God?" Faith itself will suffer shipwreck, for then God Himself will have failed, and broken His word.

Those who know nothing of this experience will be ready to say, Has not God promised deliverance? Has He not said, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee?" And will He not deliver? Wait, and help will

come. All this is true, and it is easy so to speak so long as the speaker is not in the furnace himself. You may yet have to drink this wine of astonishment, and then you will discover how fearful is the trial. Here is its perplexity and distress. Let us believe that God will come even as He has promised; but how are we faring in the meantime? The furnace is waxing hotter, and the flames are threatening more than the bonds. Saul is pursuing; the pursuit is becoming closer, the escape narrower; the enemy cannot but triumph at last. One prop after another has given way; the house cannot stand much longer. The grave is closing upon our hopes; shall the grave give up its dead? Monica hoped that some day, through the influence of home, her loved but prodigal son would be a child of her God; but when she found he was preparing to go to Italy, she concluded that, should this design be accomplished, her hope was perished for ever. Supposing God comes to deliver, by the time He comes all will be over, and any deliverance will be of no avail. Thus this waiting time often becomes a day of perplexity and terror, and may land the sufferer in the castle of the giant Despair.

In dealing with this often most painful experience, we would emphasise three points:—

First. That various afflictions are the ap-

pointed lot of all men, especially of all the children of God. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." We need not therefore count it a "strange" thing if we should be plunged into deep waters. Should it be so, we may yet be assured that "there hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man." There are multitudes in the same dark valley as you are in, though you are ready to think you are all alone in your present experience. You are not indeed alone, for you are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. Or, to say the same thing in another way, wherever there is faith it will be tried. It can grow only through trial. Yea, the stronger the faith the greater the strain to which it will be subjected. If the Syrophenician woman's faith was put to a severe test, it was because her faith was great. Hence, then, here is the first thing to be remembered in all trial, that it is a law of life, a universal experience, the heritage of all the sons of Jacob.

Second. But yet again. Though faith will be tried, it will neither be disappointed, put to shame, nor destroyed. The bruised reed He shall not break, and the smoking flax He shall not quench. For He will not contend for ever, neither will He be always wroth; for the spirit would fail before Him, and the souls which He made. In other words, if this is true, "Many

are the afflictions of the righteous;" this is equally true, "But the Lord delivereth him out of them all." However many, however painful, however peculiar, out of them all the Lord will deliver. We need not stop here to remark how many parallel passages might be quoted which assert the same thing. The anxious reader will find them out for himself. Let this therefore be received as a truth which cannot be questioned, that in some way, that is, in God's way, and therefore the best way; that at some time, that is, in God's time, and therefore the best time, deliverance will come to the praying and waiting soul. Though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come; it will not tarry.

"Wait for His seasonable aid,
And if it tarry, wait;
The promise may be long delayed,
But cannot come too late."

Third. "But what is to become of us in the meantime?" This is the cry of weary, waiting, sorrowful souls. If there is no bread till the harvest ripens, there is nothing before us but slow starvation; and when the harvest comes, there will be none to eat it. If this trial last much longer, and increase in severity, as it has already done, deliverance, when it comes, will be needless and useless. Nay, there is not only a promise of eventual deliverance, but a

promise of present keeping till the deliverance comes. "He keepeth all his bones, not one of them is broken" (Ps. xxxiv. 20). Here may all fears be cast away. We have not only the promise of deliverance out of all our afflictions, but of safe keeping while they last. Not a bone shall be broken; no real hurt shall be suffered. The storm may rage and threaten you every moment with destruction, but it can only terrify, it cannot destroy.

Nor here have we a solitary promise to rely upon; it is often repeated (Is. xliii. 2; Ps. xxiii. 4, 5; Ps. xci. 15; 1 Cor. x. 13, etc., etc.). Moreover, what proofs and illustrations we have of this consoling assurance in every biography of God's children! How was it with Job? Did deliverance come to him too late? "The Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than the beginning." We hear Jacob saying, "All these things are against me." But though everything was dark round about him, all was well, and the processes were moving on apace which resulted in his complete deliverance—not a bone was broken. Through what surprising vicissitudes did Joseph pass—a slave, a dweller in a dungeon, forgotten apparently by man and God, yet deliverance came, and did not come too late. He suffered, but not a bone of him was broken; he was only benefited and blest

by his afflictions. We find David, in like manner, in the midst of the incessant persecutions of Saul, losing heart, and saying, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul"; but he did not perish—not a bone of him was broken. We can, in like manner, with the utmost confidence, appeal to the experience of all who have, for any length of time, lived in fellowship with God. You, too, found this promise amazingly fulfilled. You had many fears, but they were all disappointed. You suffered much, but you did not suffer any real hurt. On the contrary, like the argosy which goes to the distant country, you brought home from the perils to which you were exposed many delightful memories, many sweet-smelling flowers, and many substantial fruits.

Let us repeat. This testimony is universal. If the present writer were called upon to give evidence here, he could only say that he has been at the gates of death, both literally and metaphorically, oftener than once or twice, and, at the end of the dark valley, he invariably found that he had suffered no real hurt; not a bone was broken; he was only enriched in his knowledge of the love, condescension, and faithfulness of God. Here then is a cup of consolation for those who are drinking the wine of astonishment, because of God's dealings with them. And we cannot better conclude than

with the familiar words of Cowper, so simple yet so true :—

“ Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take ;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
With blessings on your head.

“ Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for his grace.
Behind a frowning Providence,
He hides a smiling face.”

XVII

DISAPPOINTMENT

THE path of life is strewn with the fallen blossoms of hope. As we trace our course backward, we remember how here one cherished illusion disappeared without leaving a wrack behind; how in that other place, where we expected to reap what we had sown in tears, we found nothing to gather; and how, time after time, our calculations were baffled, and our fondly-cherished dreams left behind them only a painful memory of disappointed hopes.

How affecting it is to look upon the countenances of most men and women as they reach the turning-point of life, and to read there not only the lines of sorrow and care, but the tokens of blighted expectations, and of a life which refuses the cup of happiness which they expected to be able to put to their lips! Were we to bring out, as from some secret repository, the dead leaves which we had garnered during life of our blighted anticipations, what an array would lie before us—how many and what sorrowful memories they would awaken! God

mercifully keeps us so occupied that we have seldom time thus to reflect on life; it would unnerve us for present exertion, and incline us to hateful and pessimistic thoughts.

Why does this affliction so frequently befall us? Why is our course, which we would make so straight, so often the reverse of what we intended—bewildering, unanticipated, and not seldom disappointing? The reason is obvious. God has a plan of each man's life. He has a time and sphere and work for every human being. As we read the words of Christ, how it is impressed upon us that His life had a plan, and He knew it; and the works which His "Father gave Him to finish, the same works He did"; and at last, when He came to the end of His career, He could say, "It is finished." And so it is with all men. God has marked out for them a time to be born and a time to die, and the career to be pursued between. But man takes his destiny into his own hands. The majority atheistically forget to take God into their counsels. They do not suppose they have any need for considering Him in planning their life. Their self-chosen path will thus often be in direct opposition to that chosen for them by God. Need we be astonished in such a case to find the men who thus forget God sitting in blank

despair amid the ruins of their blighted hopes? Who will contend with the Almighty? He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall He speak to them in His wrath and vex them in His sore displeasure.

Nor is this conduct peculiar to the children of this world. How common it is not only to prescribe a path for ourselves, but even to prescribe a path to God. We come to the conclusion that this is the method which we ought to pursue, that this is the path upon which events ought to march, and then we go to God and ask Him to ratify our conclusions and to bring to pass our wishes. We would go generally straight to the mark, and climb the hill of peace and prosperity without interruption or break, without wandering or delay. But our wishes are seldom fulfilled. Even when God means to give us what we aim at, there are many alternations of failure and success before the end comes. Thus disappointments crowd our path. Nor is it difficult, as we have said, to see the reason. Your plan and God's are at variance. Can we expect that we will triumph over God? If we attempt to *force* Providence, instead of *following* Providence, will it be wonderful if the effort is vain and fruitless?

Doubtless God often against His own plan

allows us to triumph. The vessel in the potter's hand may refuse to be what the potter designed it for. The result may therefore be something very different from what the potter originally intended. But the loss is the vessel's. It might have been a vase of perfect symmetry, and fit for the highest uses; but instead it becomes an earthen pot and serves the meanest ends. How often it thus comes to pass that it is the greatest of misfortunes to attain our own ends, to have our wishes gratified. Well may we always pray that God's will may be done and not ours; anxiously may we seek to be, and to do, not what in our judgment seems wisest and best, but only all that Infinite Wisdom and Infinite Love proposes for us.

I. We remark then first, that God often disappoints us to teach us submission to His will. The chariot of destiny is driven by God Himself; but in our ignorance and presumption we would take the reins into our own hands. "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" is a cry which does not ordinarily proceed from the new-born soul. It is often long before this lesson is learnt. Many and painful experiences are necessary before the natural self-will and self-sufficiency are expelled from the heart. To "wait" is a duty against which the flesh rebels. Since God will not open the door, we will open

it ourselves. Since God will not give us, we will help ourselves. Since Samuel delays to come to offer the sacrifice, Saul will do it with his own unholy hands. As God delays to come to David's help, he will escape into the land of the Philistines.

It is plain that in such self-chosen paths disappointments and defeats await us. It is plain, moreover, that even when the right end is attained the road thereto is made needlessly more painful. It will also often happen that the end will be missed altogether. Hence it follows that disappointments will be few or many according as we fall in with the will of God, or labour to determine our own destiny. Disappointments, therefore, are God's discipline, by means of which He would mortify self-will, and teach us to seek supremely Himself and His glory.

II. Disappointments again are sent us because God means to give us something better than what we have chosen for ourselves. This is a most familiar experience. We have set our heart upon the attainment of some particular good. We are persuaded that it would in all respects be suitable to us. What success do we promise ourselves, should we only possess it! And we use every means, and call upon God to grant us our heart's desire. But lo! when the time comes for the blessing to fall

into our lap, it misses us altogether ; it is given to some one who, in our opinion, neither needs it nor deserves it. We are in dismay. Darkness encompasses our path. For a time we are stunned. Even to pray is a task, and a weariness. But submission is imperative. We suffer in silence ; a tone of sadness is imparted to our life ; we learn to acquiesce in the dispensations of Providence ; the wound is not quite healed, but it gradually becomes less painful. But is this all ? By no means. The mystery will yet be cleared up. At some unexpected hour another door, and that in a totally different direction, opens. Here is at length the very blessing which was needed. In our blindness we chose mistakenly. We can see that now. But God knew better than we did, and in His love He refused to give us what would have been unsuitable to us. And now, instead of murmuring over God's dispensations, we cannot sufficiently admire His wisdom and love in disappointing our hopes, and bestowing upon us something better than we asked or hoped for. Thus we may always say, "Good is the will of the Lord," even when that will crosses our most cherished expectations. "Wait on the Lord, and keep His way, and He shall exalt thee to inherit the land."

III. Again, God disappoints us at present to give us what we seek at some better time.

How bitter must have been Joseph's disappointment when the ungrateful butler forgot him! Probably the rule of the prison was that he who entered it left all hope behind him. Joseph would not thus give himself up to despair, as he knew the God of his fathers. Yet as month after month passed by without a single gleam of the coming of the day of deliverance, the iron, as the Psalmist tells us, entered into his soul. Hope would all but die. Here at length, however, is a cloud which seems to portend the coming shower. Pharaoh's chief butler and he were companions in misfortune, and were probably helpful to each other. As Joseph was invested with authority and had charge of the prisoners, he would lay his fellow-prisoner under many obligations. He could not but expect that when the butler regained his liberty and his place of influence he would exert himself in his behalf. And all that was needful was that his case should be laid before the king; for, as he tells the butler when he asked him to mention him to Pharaoh, "he had been stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews, and had done nothing that they should put him into the dungeon." Joseph had ample reason for indulging now in the hope of speedy deliverance. "Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him." What a sore disappointment! Two

years longer apparently was he the inmate of the prison before the hour of his deliverance came.

But then, when his hopes were at last realised, how much richer the inheritance than would have been his portion had his early expectations been fulfilled! Had the prison doors opened to him two years before, he would probably have had to wander as a beggar till he reached his father's tent. But instead he takes his place as next only to the king of Egypt.

Thus also, then, does God often for a time disappoint our hopes only to realise them more fully and abundantly "in due season." God's choice of time, as well as God's choice of gift, will always be found to be the wisest and best. That which would have injured us yesterday, will only bless us to-day; and therefore yesterday it was refused that it may be given us to-day. Here again we may say, even in the midst of the bitterest disappointments, "Good is the will of the Lord." "He doeth all things well."

IV. Yet once more, we must often recognise the fact that our disappointments, or our sense of disappointment, is unreasonable and foolish. We are ready to forget that there is a law of orderly development by which God works out His plans. Would the husbandman have a

right to be disappointed when he discovered that the seed he sowed yesterday had not yet even appeared above the soil? And many of our disappointments are as unreasonable. Nothing short of a miracle could prevent such disappointments. The orderly processes of nature, the slow development of the human spirit, or the gradual unfolding of the events of Divine Providence, must precede many of the results which we hope and pray for. We hope and pray for the conversion of the world to Christ; but have we a right to be disappointed because God does not in some speedy, miraculous way bring this about? No! we wait in faith and in patience for the fulfilment of His promise. We know that many things must happen, many revolutions must be accomplished before this grand result will be attained. But meanwhile God is not idle; His Spirit is abroad; doors are being opened, and walls are falling down before the besiegers, and all things are hastening to their grand consummation.

This same law obtains in the lesser affairs of life. In the nature of things our wishes cannot always be immediately realised. Some of them indeed will never be seen save by the vision of faith. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were persuaded of them"—so the

apostle speaks of the patriarchs. And so must it be with many hopes which animate us now. We can only see them afar off and be persuaded of them, but they cannot be realised in our time. Only in the world to come will every bud become a flower and every flower the bud of a better.

There is one disappointment which is often very perplexing, but which is only perplexing while we fail to perceive God's gracious design. We have here the familiar illustration of the apostle's thorn in the flesh. This was evidently a source of much pain and distress, probably humiliating in its character, and in the apostle's opinion, a hindrance to his ministry. The apostle was a man of prayer. He knew by abundant experience that God hears prayer. Naturally enough he lays his thorn before the Lord, explains its grievousness, complains that it hinders his usefulness, and asks that it may be removed. He is doubtless for a while perplexed and distressed, since in spite of his prayers the grievance continues. "Hath God forgotten to be gracious, hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?" Nay, the dark cloud passes away. The Lord in some way opens His eyes to see that it was His will that the cross should be continued, since His servant required the discipline lest he should be exalted above measure. Yea, the

promise was given him, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for strength made perfect in weakness." Here was disappointment. But it was such an answer to his prayers as would not only satisfy him, but would fill his heart with thankfulness, since it so evidenced the Lord's care for His servant; and, after all, that is, despite the natural painfulness of the thorn, the grace given to bear it, would make the burden light.

This is not an uncommon experience with the children of God. We find ourselves wedded to some uncomfortable position. We cannot extricate ourselves from it. In our distress we call upon God and wait for deliverance. But lo! the heavens are as brass, and the earth iron. God is silent: the grievance is continued. It is plainly not the will of the Lord at present at least that the burden should be removed. But lo! it gradually dawns upon the suppliant that the Lord is hearing his prayer, though not after the fashion looked for. In ways wonderful the burden becomes lighter. Nay, it becomes a means of grace. It drives the sufferer often to his knees. It strips him of all boasting and self-righteousness. It brings him nearer to the Lord, and makes him live in a state of constant dependence. He will increasingly confess the loving-kindness of the Lord. Has God in such experiences disappointed us? Who will say so?

Are there no hopes then which we may indulge in with the perfect certainty that they will be fulfilled? Yes, there are. Let it be remembered that here every thing depends upon the foundation upon which hope is made to rest. Concerning the hopes which some entertain, we are prepared to say at once that they are fallacious—they rest upon no solid foundation whatever. The Micawbers are always hoping that “something will turn up,” and, as their hopes have the slenderest of foundations, they are naturally disappointed. So it is quite possible for us to found a hope on some most probable occurrence, and a hope therefore in the highest degree likely to be realised; and yet by some sudden or unexpected turn of events the expectation may be utterly baffled. Where then shall we find a sure and solid foundation? Ah! it is here, where the Psalmist found it, “In His word do I hope.” All else may fail us, but His word, never. “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My word shall not pass away.” Let us then have a warrant for our hope in His word, and we may indulge in it with the utmost confidence. We may indeed have long to wait for its fulfilment. Many things may happen which seem to make its fulfilment impossible. But God will redeem His word. It will spring up even from the grave. And all the hopes

we have founded thereupon, both for time and for eternity, will at the right time be realised. "Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not."

XVIII

ENEMIES

ENEMIES—how harsh and hateful is the word! How it pains, humbles, to think that one man should be the enemy of, and seek to injure his fellow! It is one of the most hateful products of man's sinful nature; a work of the flesh so gross that even unspiritual eyes can discern its hideousness.

But however hateful and hideous this passion, alas! how common it is. There are times when the surface of life is so smooth and unruffled that its existence may be ignored; times when, as we come across the word in the Psalms of David, we feel that it gives them an air of unreality, and we cannot in the least sympathise with his moods. Deeper and more thoughtful experiences of life, however, teach us a different lesson; and instead of complaining that the Word of God so often speaks of this harsh discord of man's being, we admire its wonderful correspondence with human experience.

We read sometimes of the man who never

had an enemy ; and we are ready to think that this ought to be the normal state of things ; and that, when men have enemies, it is only because they have called them into being by their character and conduct. This is a very shallow view of life, and probably he who entertains it will some day experience a rude awakening.

I. And here let us remark in the first place, do not regard it as "if some strange thing had happened unto you," when you discover, to your astonishment and dismay, that you have enemies. It is nothing strange ; it is, on the contrary, "a temptation common to man." The best of men have been so afflicted. "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord." It was the experience of the Master, and shall His servants hope to escape ? "They that will live godly must suffer persecution." Can you name the upright and God-fearing man who never had enemies ? The exceptions to the rule, where are they ? The cautious, the worldly-wise, may indeed never come to an open collision. The weak and the yielding may never be spoken of in terms of hatred, but only in terms of contempt. So far from its being a strange experience to have enemies, it would be a strange experience to be always without them. Nay, it would be an experience which might lawfully give

rise to the suspicion of a want of uprightness, of unfaithfulness to convictions and to God. "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you" is the saying of heavenly wisdom.

But what perplexes and distresses you is that your enemies are "enemies without a cause." This was the complaint of David, or David's greater Son, "They compassed me about with words of hatred, and fought against me without a cause." If you had injured them in any way, you would not have been astonished. But so far from this, your wish and desire has been to do them good. You may have even attempted to heap coals of fire upon their head, but they have only rendered you evil for good. All this may be literally true. Yet, however beneficent be your character, and however charitable your deeds, you will not escape this painful experience. It is vain indeed to labour to escape it. The very efforts which are made to avoid it, will in all probability only hasten such afflictions. The path of safety and peace is undoubtedly to walk uprightly. "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger."

II. The fertile root from which the enemy springs is unquestionably *envy*. "Again I considered all travail and every right work, that for

this a man is envied of his neighbour." "Envyings," the apostle tells us, are among the works of the flesh. Wherever "the flesh" rules, there envy is a constant passion; in proportion as the flesh is unmortified, in that proportion will this hateful passion make its appearance. And, let us remark in passing, be not in too great haste to condemn your fellow, for at the best this passion sleeps in your own soul.

That which excites this evil spirit into activity is some superiority or excellence which one possesses over another. Joseph was envied by his brethren. Why? Because his father Jacob distinguished him above them. Moses was the meekest of men, yet he was envied even by his brother and sister; they railed against him and said, "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath He not spoken also by us?" Saul envied David; for "the women answered one another as they played, and said, 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.' And Saul was very wroth." And how often are the wicked counsels of the Jews against our Lord attributed to envy? Even Pilate "knew that the chief priests had delivered Him for envy." Thus such, alas! is man, that when he sees any excellency or superiority in his fellow, he envies him. Be the superiority what it may; be it character, or position, or posses-

sions; be it the favour of God or the favour of man—the moment you rise above your fellows, that moment envious eyes begin to watch you, and envious spirits desire your hurt.

It does not, of course, follow that this envy must always burst out into open enmity. God's providential restraints interpose to prevent the sin of the heart becoming the deed of the hand. But this is the seed which requires only the sun of favouring circumstances to spring up and bring forth its deadly fruit. Happy will be your lot in this world, if it is not frequently embittered by this upas tree.

III. Naturally when we find ourselves the objects of this baleful passion, we are inclined to be filled with alarms. How much evil and injury may one man do to another? The open or secret enemy may seem to have it in his power not only to injure but irreparably to destroy the man he hates. He may work against him by secret wiles, or he may be emboldened to an open attack; and all attempts to ward off the blow may seem hopeless. How speedily may David's conclusion be reached, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul."

But ere you fall into this state of alarm, ask the question whether, in this affliction, faith has

anything to say. If the word of God is the man of our counsel, and travels with us in all the intricacies of life, must we not turn to it for guidance and consolation? And when we turn to it, how abundantly do we find this fear provided against.

To begin with, consider that however great, powerful, or influential are those that hate you, they are in the hands of the Maker of the heavens and the earth. "Who art thou that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass?" Enter into the chamber of God's omnipotence, and under the shadow of His wings you have safety and peace. Consider again, that the law of God's Providence is to spread our table "in the presence of our enemies." But if He thus places us and all that He gives us so as to be seen and envied, that implies that between us and danger is an invisible shield. We should otherwise go through the world in constant terror, lest envious hands should follow the envious eyes and rob us of our portion. He has promised us, on the contrary, ample protection. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so is the Lord round about His people from henceforth and for ever. For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous." Ay, he has promised that "no weapon that is formed against thee

shall prosper ; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn." Or let faith fasten upon the promises of the ninety-first psalm, and you "will not fear though tens of thousands of people set themselves against you round about." But to quote farther is needless, as every reader of the Bible must be familiar with some of the many promises which testify to the same gracious protection which God throws around His people.

IV. The plain path of duty then, with these promises as our shield, is to stand still and see the salvation of God. Let all anxiety and fear be cast to the winds. You have put your burden into the hands of your Heavenly Father. There let it rest. It is His care now, not yours any more. He can and does work wonderfully for the deliverance of His people. Be only in the path of duty, be only in the place He has chosen for you, be diligently and honestly doing the work He has put into your hands, and in the midst of seeming danger you are perfectly safe. If you give way to unbelieving fears, you only invite the calamities you dread. "Should such a man as I flee?" said Nehemiah when he was bidden give way to natural fears. Nay, wait patiently for the wonder working hand which hastens to your help. Saul was perfectly helpless to injure David, though he had kingly

power to enable him to work his will. Every plot he conceived was blighted, and every weapon he used was broken in his hands. David's God is yours, and in Him you must trust.

V. Some will be ready to demand an apology for discussing such a subject, and proclaiming such truths. Now, it is true that the task is an ungrateful one of probing the sores of sinful humanity. But they will not be ignored, however much we may dislike to contemplate them. If you can pass through life without such experiences as we have hinted at, it is well; and you may thank God for escaping a common affliction. But such an experience is an exception—yes, a rare exception. We are sinful men, and we live among sinful men, and must not be astonished if the sinfulness of men sometimes painfully affect us. But more than this, how frequently is the affliction alluded to in the Scriptures. It is not ignored there. The false spirituality which would live as if the world were not, finds no countenance there. More than this, the sad facts of human life, of which we have been speaking, afford a platform for the exercise of one of the most beautiful of Christian virtues. Who, even of the children of this world, has not admired the precept, "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you, and pray

for them which despitefully use and persecute you ? ”

If we pray for protection from those who seek to injure us, much more must we pray for our enemies themselves. We pray for all men, but must of necessity pray for our enemies in particular. Not only in this do we obey the precept, and copy the example of our Heavenly Master ; but there is a special reason for the discharge of the duty in this, that their inward sores and wounds lie open and festering before us. We know that all men suffer from the diseases of sin ; but these are specially known to us, and their very sins from which we suffer, cry for our compassion. To be, therefore, an enemy of the true child of God, is to engage his intercession at the throne of grace. He prays for his friends, but when he prays for his enemies, his fervour increases. He presents them to God, as those who especially need the help of His grace. He presents them to God as those who, in His Holy Providence, have been committed to him for the exercise of his charity and compassion. And in so doing he only proves his kindred with God and with Christ. And rich will be his recompense. Not seldom will it happen that the enemy will become the friend, the Christian brother. It will certainly follow that the arm which was raised to strike will become powerless and

paralysed. And it will still more certainly follow that, if the prayer be answered in no other way, it will at least return into the bosom in which it was born, and from which it issued forth.

XIX

PRAYER AND FORGIVENESS

It is at first sight an astonishing thing that our Lord should so frequently and impressively connect successful prayer with a forgiving spirit. After teaching us to pray "Our Father," He adds, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. vi. 14, 15). The same warning must have been repeated on the same occasion, for we read in Luke vi. 37, "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven." The same lesson is enforced in the parable of the Two Debtors, and the conclusion is, "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matt. xviii. 35). Once more, in that precious passage in Mark xi., where He discourses of faith and prayer, He says, "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any: that your Father also

which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses."

It must be concluded from this that the unforgiving spirit must be a state of mind to which all, and even His disciples, are exceedingly prone. In our self-complacency we are not very ready to admit this. We are ready to persuade ourselves that our sentiments are those of universal benevolence. The spirit of vengeance seems too coarse a passion for us to indulge in. From that, at least, we are in haste to claim to be free.

If this, however, were so, it is impossible to understand why the Lord so frequently and so impressively warns us against it, or why the Apostle, when speaking of the duty of intercession, should tell us "to lift up holy hands without *wrath* and doubting." The truth here is that the spirit of vengeance, like all other evil passions, is a seed which lies slumbering in the soul, and awaits only the sun of temptation to awake it to intense activity. Let us suppose you are surrounded with an atmosphere of domestic peace and happiness. While this lasts you are utterly unconscious of an unforgiving spirit. But you go forth into the world and mingle in its affairs. You will soon meet with many bold and unscrupulous indi-

viduals. They will not hesitate, if it seems to their advantage, to trample you under foot, and pass on as if they had done a virtuous action. What are your feelings now? Or yet again, you are treading the path of prosperity, and pursuing your way, unconscious of evil, but the eye of envy fastens upon you, and to your astonishment and dismay the hand of envy is stretched out to injure. But it is needless to recount the various forms of "man's inhumanity to man." There are wrongs everywhere, and many deep and lasting, for which there is no redress. The successful wrong-doer does not seem in the least to feel ashamed of his action; on the contrary, he often glories in it.

Thus everywhere temptation abounds to awake this sleeping passion, and sometimes, under a deep sense of wrong, it flames forth like a volcano, terrifying even its victim, as he discovers himself capable of passions which he thought were alien to his nature. Ah! then the forgiving spirit is not so easy as it seemed. In our struggle after it we may try compromises; we may forgive and not forget; we may demand some kind of acknowledgment or repentance before we see it our duty to forgive; we may forgive outwardly, and still retain the grudge; we may abstain from vengeance, but the poison is there. This is certainly not the forgiveness which Christ enjoins. This is cer-

tainly not the forgiveness which we ourselves require of God.

And it is by understanding the forgiveness we need from God that we learn the kind of forgiveness we must extend to our fellow-sinners. Does God forgive *freely*? What does that mean? Does it not imply that He forgives without any reparation being offered on the sinner's part? You have sinned, you have robbed God. Can you pay Him back again? Is there anything you can render Him as even an approach to an equivalent to what you have taken from Him? The future is His, as well as the past, and the work of the future is all owing to Him. Repentance is only a confession of guilt, it is not the payment of a debt. If God, therefore, forgives at all, He must altogether remit the debt, and relinquish His rights. If we, then, forgive like Him, our forgiveness must be without compensation of any kind. A composition such as takes place in commerce when the debtor is unable to pay the whole, is not a condition of the Divine forgiveness, neither must it be of ours.

But God forgives for Christ's sake. God does receive compensation for our trespasses. Christ's soul was made an offering for sin. God, therefore, can freely forgive because the sin is atoned for. Now, this wrong done to

you was, in the first place, a wrong done to God. But He imputeth not our trespasses unto us. God therefore forgives it. For us, then, to refuse to forgive what God for Christ's sake forgives would be to deny the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice. It would be to say that though this wrong was atoned for, it was not sufficiently atoned for. Surely we would shrink from that. It follows that since we must confess the sufficiency of that atonement, then the sin, the wrong, is gone, and gone completely. There is no further room for resentment. However torn and bleeding our feelings may be, and however we may feel affected, the reconciliation is complete.

But it will be further said that, before we can or ought freely to forgive, there ought to be some acknowledgment of the wrong done, some measure of repentance or confession. But in this case there would be no forgiving freely, inasmuch as something was offered by way of compensation. Neither would such forgiveness be for Christ's sake in any absolute sense. Neither in thus forgiving would we forgive like our Father in heaven. Let it be remembered that, "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." God forgave us in effect before there was confession or repentance. The confession and repentance came after the forgiveness, not before. Confession was not

the condition of forgiveness, but the fruit of it.

We put the matter in another form only when we say, we know no man after the flesh. We behold transgressors. They are transgressing, let us suppose, against us. And these transgressions of theirs, though against us, are sins against God. But how is God dealing with man's sin? He is not imputing it. This is the day of mercy. These sins were laid upon the shoulders of the Substitute. As we see and feel the sin, let us turn from it to the sufferer for this sin, and lo! our resentment is gone. We can then say, "I beheld transgressors, and was grieved"—not enraged, not filled with thoughts of vengeance, but grieved.

More than this we have no rights, though God has. "We are in the same condemnation." Debtors ourselves, how can we be creditors to another? Supposing the servant who owed his fellow-servant a hundred pence had paid his debt, his immediate creditor could not have claimed the sum; it was already forfeited to *his* creditor. In order that he might obtain something to reduce his own debt, he might have lawfully endeavoured to obtain his hundred pence, but only to hand it over to *his own* creditor. Considering ourselves, therefore, on the same level in the same transgression, equally debtors with our fellows, we may well freely

forgive, even as we are freely forgiven. It is plain that the unforgiving spirit is thus a self-righteous spirit. The man with the broken and the contrite heart, feeling deeply his own need of forgiveness, will not find it difficult to forgive others.

It is easy now to see that to refuse to forgive is to render our prayers unacceptable to God. He who does not forgive need not be astonished if he finds the heavens over his head brass, and the earth iron. He violates a condition of acceptable prayer which our Lord plainly and peremptorily prescribes. We have here no alternative. Sternly we must put the evil thing away from us, however difficult the task may be. More than this, when the thought of our wrongs, and the wrong-doer, presses upon us, we must imitate the Lord Himself, and say,—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

If the prayer of the unforgiving cannot be accepted of God, it is equally true that the unforgiving cannot really pray. They are destitute of all spiritual strength. They are on the eve of a fall, if they have not already fallen. David's anger was readily enough kindled against the rich man who took the poor man's ewe lamb; upon him he would have exercised summary vengeance. But this readiness on his part to punish the supposed transgressor was only a

sign of his own fallen condition. It is when the debtor is most deeply in debt himself that he is most ready to lay his hand on his debtor's throat, and to say—"Pay me what thou owest." The more wicked men are, the more severely will they act towards their fellows. It is the man who prays, "God be merciful to me a sinner," who alone will extend mercy to his fellows, and who can hopefully ask mercy for himself.

Let us conclude with an illustration of the unmerciful spirit, and its disastrous consequences, by quoting a story related by the historian Fleury, told by Trench in his notes on the parables. Between two Christians at Antioch enmity and division had fallen out. After a while one of them desired to be reconciled, but the other, who was a priest, refused. While it was thus with them, the persecution under Valerian began; and Sapricius, the priest, having boldly confessed himself a Christian, was on his way to death. Nicephorus met him, and again sued for peace, which was again refused. While he was seeking, and the other refusing, they arrived at the place of execution. He that should have been a martyr was here terrified, offered to sacrifice to the gods, and, despite the entreaties of the other, did so, making shipwreck of his faith; while Nicephorus, boldly confessing, stepped into his place, and received

the crown which Sapricius lost. Before Sapricius could have had grace to confess thus to Christ, he must have had his own ten thousand talents forgiven ; but refusing to forgive a far lesser wrong, to put away the displeasure he had taken up on some infinitely lighter grounds against his brother, he forfeited all the advantages of his position, *his* Lord was angry, withdrew from him His grace, and suffered him to fall again under those powers of evil from which he had once been delivered. What a lesson on the text, "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee ; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way ; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift !" (Matt. v. 23, 24.)

XX

THE DISTANT AND THE FUTURE

It is most important that we have in all our praying a sense of reality. We must regard the work of prayer as a real business. It is fatal to its success, as well as deadening to ourselves, to pray as a matter of course, or to pray for things which we never expect in any sense to receive. We ought to watch against merely traditional or customary phrases, or petitions to which we may attach no very definite meaning, or from which we expect no definite result. Those accustomed to join in the prayers of others naturally repeat themselves what they frequently hear. These phrases and petitions seem natural and appropriate ; they give roundness to periods and stateliness to the diction—and why not echo them ?

Now it may be that we ought to join in and repeat such petitions. The probability is that we ought. Those who first originated them knew what they meant, and expected to gain something by their prayers. For us, however, to repeat them, merely because others do, or because they seem appropriate, and for no other

reason, is something like hypocrisy. Better lay all such expressions aside, until we can enter into the spirit of them and feel that we are aiming at something by their utterance.

There are prayers habitually offered up concerning persons and things apparently far removed from us. We pray for ourselves, and we pray with intelligence and hope ; we pray for our families, and pray with fervour ; we pray for our friends, and our prayers are laden with fervent desires ; but when we go beyond this charmed circle, our devotion is apt to languish, a suspicion of the uselessness of our prayers is apt to creep over us, and, but for a sense of propriety, we would cease before the call to this department of prayer comes. Or yet again, we listen with interest, and join fervently in the public prayer, so long as it is confined to present and personal wants, but interest ceases when the more distant and complicated affairs are alluded to.

The causes of this state of mind are especially two. In the first place, it results from sheer selfishness. We are deeply concerned only about persons or things in which we have a personal interest. The Church and the world may be left to take care of themselves so long as we are safe. Alas ! that this spirit should so extensively prevail. It need not be said that, like all selfishness, it cheats itself. We are too

closely connected with the Church and the world, however humble we may be, not to be affected by their changes of fortune. In praying for the peace of Jerusalem, and "in seeking the peace of the city," we are in truth praying for ourselves, and our interests. But, over and above this, are the glory of God and the good of our fellow-men, nothing to us? Shall we warm ourselves at the fire, while, at a little distance from us, Christ is being tried and buffeted? It was not thus that the prophets and the holy men of God beheld "the strivings of the people." They were often, on the contrary, to be seen on the crest of the wave, labouring to guide the current into its proper channel, or if they were shut up to helplessness, rivers of water ran down their eyes. Away with this kind of selfishness! It is hateful in the extreme. It is especially hateful when it is assumed as a sign of a high devotion, when it is nursed and paraded as an evidence that "the churches" have become worldly, because they interest themselves in the affairs of ordinary humanity—a sin which they piously abhor.

But there is another cause for this state of mind—a want of faith in the efficacy of prayer. Of what value, we are ready to ask, can our individual or social prayers be to a nation or a community? We pray for the sovereign, for his ministers, and for those in authority, but

are we likely to see any effects produced by our supplications? will they have any appreciable influence upon their character and conduct? Party conflicts, personal ambitions, commercial rivalries, will rule all the same, and it is on these lines that public affairs proceed.

To this scarcely expressed opinion of the uselessness of such prayers, we have, in the first place, to answer that, whatever their value, they are commanded. "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour" (1 Tim. ii. 1, 2). It is plainly prescribed to us as a duty, and whether we are able to see the happy effects of such intercessions or not, this is a duty which we must perform.

But will such prayers be in vain? Is any true prayer in vain? It is true we may not be able to perceive the effects of which our supplications are the cause. The answer, moreover, may be delayed, even if some day the answer should become visible. But the true prayer is a cause which must, like other causes, have its effect. The sun in summer and autumn refuses

to pierce the clouds by which it is hidden. There is a cause. The consequences are not immediate, but they are certain, and will make themselves felt by and by in deficient crops, and in commercial distress. Let, on the other hand, the summer be characterised by a brilliant sunshine, and how many homes will be made happy by a consequent abundance. And so there is an invisible kingdom behind the visible. It is there where the forces originate which control the destinies of the world. Daniel is on his knees. Because of this the King of Persia concerns himself about one of the many peoples under his dominion, decrees that they shall return to their own land, and that every provision shall be made for their safety and comfort. Who, then, will say that the prayers of God's people have no influence upon the affairs of empires and kingdoms, or kings and of those in authority? Daniel and his fellow believers were the real masters of Persia. As the king's heart was in the hands of the Lord, as rivers of water which He could turn whithersoever He willed, and as they had access to and power with the King of Kings, they could control the thoughts of the heart of Cyrus, and Cyrus must obey.

So far, therefore, from thinking that prayer is valueless when it enters on the domain of those great spheres in which, perhaps person-

ally, we have no voice, it is the most important element in all public affairs. Well might rulers in Church and State beseech the Church to give them the benefit of their prayers. No authority will long exist which has arrayed against it the cries and tears of the children of God, whereas that authority is safe against all opposition which has on its side the prayers of the Church of God.

But we are not Daniels! He was himself not only a man of prayer, but a minister of the State, and, from his position, the father of his people. It might be expected that he would pray, and that his prayers would prevail! True enough; but Daniel was only a man of like passions with us. The value of his prayers did not spring from his position—that gave him no authority with God. The efficacy of his prayers is to be found simply in the fact that he entered into his closet and shut the door, and prayed to his Father in secret. Mary, Queen of Scots, did not fear John Knox because he was a preacher, or because he could move the multitude by his eloquence, or shut the mouths of his enemies by his uprightness, but because he was a man of prayer. Here power does not imply position, or influence with men—it is power with God; and that may be possessed by the feeblest and most insignificant among men. The invalid in his sick-chamber may be mightier

than the ruler on his throne. The Christian, therefore, ought to be, in this sense at least, a politician, and contribute his share to the public good. According to the number of politicians of this class will the world at large, or the individual state, really flourish.

The same principles which we have enunciated in regard to the affairs of the world at large apply to the nearer interests of the Church of Christ. Its labours and conflicts are often far removed from us, and the successes and victories for which we sigh are, in the nature of things, in the dim and distant future, and can never in this world be enjoyed by us. Can our prayers, in these circumstances, avail anything? and is it our duty to lay out our spiritual energies in behalf of such causes?

What sayeth the Lord? "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest." There are vast portions of the earth still as sheep without a shepherd, scattered abroad. What is wanted is labourers to gather in the scattered flock. But how are they to be obtained? No human machinery can manufacture them. Here, then, our Lord tells us they are His gifts, given in answer to prayer. This is certainly a marvellous truth. To think that the supply of

labourers depends upon our prayers. Yet, so it is; we have the authority of Christ for this wonderful fact. In the face of this, then, can we say that it would be needless for us to pray that the messengers of the cross may be multiplied, or that such prayers will be vain? We may not, indeed, see visible results. We may not be able to say of this missionary or that missionary that he was given to the Lord's work in direct answer to our individual prayers. We may have left this world before the seed of prayer which we have planted in the soil of God may bring forth its fruit, as it was with Stephen when he prayed for Saul of Tarsus, his bitter persecutor. But if we have prayed according to Christ's injunction, we have made a contribution to the spread of His kingdom—a contribution which will have its place and its power. Here, therefore, let our prayer be as real and believing as when we expect to see the result. When we thus pray, let us feel that we have done something for the coming of His kingdom. We have done a work which the day only will declare. We must be content, like the saints of old, to die in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, are persuaded of them, and embrace them.

And thus it must be with many of our prayers. There is not only the prayer of faith, but the

answer of faith. We must be content with God's assurance that our prayer cannot be lost. And knowing this, we must be eager to have a share in every good work. To the extent of our means, we love to contribute to every Christian enterprise. Missions at home and missions abroad share our beneficence. And we are persuaded that, however small our contribution, yet it does something to forward a great work. The thousands are made up of hundreds, the hundreds are made up of pounds, and the pounds are made up of pence. Even, therefore, if our contribution be only pence, yet the pence help to make the thousands, and therefore we do not refuse our pence because we are not able to contribute our thousands. Yet that our contribution plays its part in the great whole is with us a matter of faith. We can only in imagination see the pile of which it forms a part.

It is precisely thus with our prayers for the several departments of Christian work, and for Christ's kingdom as a whole. We may not often see this or that work prospering because of our intercessions. Though we pray daily for the coming of Christ's kingdom, it comes not. But we must not conclude, on that account, that it is labour in vain thus to pray. The waters are accumulating, perhaps, in our estimation, slowly. The little rill which we contribute to

the great volume may scarcely be an appreciable addition. Yet the ocean is composed of drops. The mightiest rivers grow till they may be mistaken for the ocean, so far apart may be their banks. But they have grown to have this irresistible might by the streamlets which have descended to them from every hill-side as they passed along. And so it is with our prayers. There is not one of them lost. Human arithmetic cannot reckon their place or their power, but God can, and does.

There is evidence that the affairs of this world are ever moving onward at an accelerating pace. The work of a century in former times is now accomplished in a decade. Changes vast and momentous take place almost faster than they can be recorded. A thirty years' war of former ages now occupies thirty days. Still greater and more wonderful things may be in the near future. A nation will be born at once. "A short work will the Lord make upon the earth." And may we not connect this with the accumulating prayers of the Church which yet await their answer? God treasures up the prayers of His people, He puts their tears into a bottle; the cloud gathers in depth as it overspreads the heavens; the golden vials are filling with odours, which are the prayers of the saints; the souls of them

that were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held, are still crying with a loud voice, saying—"How long, O Lord, holy and true,"—and may we not expect that these gathering forces will some day soon make their appearance in a harvest surpassing our largest hopes. We may not, in this world, see the fruit of our prayers for the ingathering of the Gentiles, and the salvation of the Jews. But we know that that time will come, and in a state of glory shall we rejoice in the fulfilment of the promise we pleaded. Meanwhile, in the full assurance, it is our happiness to be enabled to contribute to the hastening of the time by our prayers and tears. "Prayer shall be made for Him continually, and daily shall He be praised."

By way of illustration of what is written in regard to prayer for the distant and the future, we may remark that as we write these words of this chapter we hear and read everywhere around us glowing tributes to the memory of our late beloved sovereign, Queen Victoria. That she possessed every virtue fitted to excite admiration, that she was exemplary in all life's relations, as a wife, a mother, and a sovereign everyone confesses. Not a dissentient voice mingles in this chorus of praise. Never in the

world's history could such panegyrics have been pronounced.

Amid all this laudation the part played in her character and history by the grace of God seems to be largely overlooked. Everyone will confess that she was a gift of God to the empire and the world. She was born with a beautiful nature, and from the first won all love and admiration by the natural grace by which she was endowed. But very early in life she was called to fulfil the highest and most difficult duties, and to act where the slightest mistake would have had the most perilous consequences. But through this terrible ordeal she passed, in the opinion of all, not only scathless, but in the noblest fashion. Is it fanaticism to connect all this with the prayers of her people as cause and effect? Doubtless the prayers offered by many were merely formal, official, as a matter of duty, of propriety. But with multitudes it was not so. They said sincerely, "God save the Queen." In looking back upon her long life and reign, so beautiful, so faultless, so honouring to God and so beneficent to her people and to the world, must we not conclude that many true prayers were offered in her behalf, and these prayers have been abundantly answered. Here surely we are reminded that however unnoticed and unknown we may be, we may bless the state, bless the king, bless every

righteous cause, bless the world if we remember to act upon the divine injunction—"Seek the peace of the city, and pray unto the Lord for it, for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace" (Jer. xxix. 7 ; 1 Tim. ii. 2).

XXI

THE WILL OF GOD

THERE are many perplexing questions which belong to prayer in relation to the will of God. Moreover, no one will undertake to solve them all or to solve them completely. They all run up eventually into the insoluble problems of God's sovereignty and man's freedom. But happily, as in many other directions, the difficulties belong more to theory than experience. They are speculative rather than practical; and as we cannot solve the mysteries of life, and yet we manage to live, so here, though we cannot solve the metaphysical difficulties suggested by the will of God and prayer, we are yet able to pray, and able at the same time to pray, "Thy will be done."

In the beginning our random suggestions on these problems, we notice first a state of mind we sometimes meet with when it is virtually said, "God's will must be done; whatever our wishes are, His will is supreme and will be carried out. What therefore need we pray, except to say, Thy will be done?" There is something very sad as well as erring in such a

state of mind. It is probably the result of long-continued, seemingly unsuccessful prayer. The suppliant has begged earnestly for some good, and it has not been granted ; or he has prayed against some coming calamity, yet the evil has not been averted ; he has sought to change the course of events, but they have moved on remorselessly despite his prayers. The conclusion, therefore, he reaches, is that God's will, doubtless always good, will always be done, and it is needless to seek to alter it.

It is plain, however, that this cannot be a Christian state of mind. It is at the least morbid and unhealthy ; and it approaches the submission of the Stoic, the fatalism of the Moslem.

There is indeed a state of soul which is like this, yet differs from it widely, when the wearied and baffled petitioner finds peace in falling into the hands of his Heavenly Father. But in this instance he has presented his case, and pleaded his cause, and then said, " Let Him do what seemeth Him good." Here he may have had a strong persuasion that his desires are good, and such as God might lawfully grant. With this persuasion he mightily begs God to grant him his heart's desire. But he knows that he is not infallible ; his way may be good, but God, in His infinite wisdom, may have a better. The aim of the petitioner may be fulfilled in a higher,

more enduring, more complete manner. Knowing, therefore, all this, the suppliant spreads his case before the Lord, indicates his wishes, but then, after all, he virtually says, "Lord, if Thou hast any better gift, or any better way, put aside my wishes and follow Thine own counsel." This is just saying, "Thy will be done." And there is nothing of fatalism here. It is the child trusting in his Father's wisdom and love.

It is impossible for any soul with a measure of health to continue in that morbid state of mind of which we have spoken. The instinct of the creature, the tearful eye of the living child, cannot be long suppressed. The Stoic will cry out because of pain in spite of himself and his theories, and the sick and sorrowful child of God must resume his devotions. As long as the heart beats, desires, wishes, and sighs will arise in it, and importunately demand utterance; the fountain of the great deep will be broken up, and this nightmare of despair will pass away.

Meanwhile it is surely a strong consolation in this trial to remember that to fall into the hands of God is the best fortune which can befall us. Granted that God denies you your present wishes, and instead gives you something else; granted, in other words, that God's will and your will are in this direction at variance, which

is sure to be good, or which is sure to be best? Here we cannot doubt. You must say, "Good is the will of the Lord." And if at this present time we cannot see the superiority of God's will to our own, be content to wait a while, and you will discover that what you thought was a calamity, is plainly seen to be the happiest of providences.

But what if nothing happens? What if all things proceed as if the machinery of Providence simply obeys remorseless law? This may be the appearance of things, but the wheels have eyes. There is infinite intelligence behind. They are working to a purpose, and you will not ultimately be disappointed with the result. Even no answer will prove an answer. The will of the Lord will become your will when the drama nears its termination, and you will bless God with a grateful heart for crossing your designs.

Here again will come the question—must we always pray in a state of uncertainty as to whether the desires we express shall be granted? It is written, "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us." Here we are certainly told that what we ask, when it is in accordance with God's will, shall be granted us. But there is now the problem—

Can we ascertain what is in accordance with His will?

Here let us remark that a distinction is generally made between what is called His secret will and His revealed will. If we may speak of God's secret will at all, it must be plain that with it we have nothing to do. "Secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children." Into the mysteries of the Godhead we cannot penetrate, and His secret purposes are beyond our ken. We have to do with God's will only in so far as it is revealed to us. We may be well sure that whatever be God's secret will, it cannot contradict His revealed will, and His revealed will is just His secret will disclosed to us. We must not, therefore, allow any notions as to the secret will of God to prove a stumbling-block to our faith, when we wait at his footstool for needed blessings.

When we come, then, to the question as to whether we can ascertain the will of God, so that we may pray with the boldness which John enjoins, the answer must be that in all the great and important things of salvation, His will is plainly revealed to us in the Scriptures. The whole Scripture is one revelation of His will, and the promises revelations of His will as to particular things. Can we doubt His will, for instance, when we pray

for the forgiveness of sins, when there are promises so many, so various and so full, which assure us of His willingness to forgive? Can we doubt in like manner that upon our asking, He will bestow upon us the gift of His Holy Spirit when He promises to give Him to them that ask Him? So in like manner His presence and help and deliverance in the time of trouble are assuredly promised us. And here how large is the liberty we enjoy! What possible spiritual need is it possible for us to be conscious of, for which we cannot find not one, but many promises? In all this region we may walk with no uncertain foot. When we ask these things, so plainly and surely promised, we are guilty of unbelief if we rise from our knees doubting whether God gives them to us. Here the promise is fulfilled, "Before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." It matters little what our feelings be. We may have no feeling that God has given us the gift we have asked, but that does not in the least invalidate God's faithfulness. It is ours to believe God. If He says He will give us certain things if we ask them for Christ's sake, then if we have asked—that is enough, the gift is ours, and we dishonour God by our unbelief if we question the fact.

Again, our desires are sometimes fixed upon things for which we may be able to find no definite promise. We say, able to find, because it may be questioned whether any lawful desire has not a promise attached to it. If we knew our Bible better, both in the letter and in the spirit, we would be able at all times to put our finger upon the very promise which God provided for the emergency. But even if we should fail in this, we may, by just and necessary inference from some promise or promises, reach the knowledge of God's will which we desire. God promises to withhold no good thing from them that seek Him. Is this a good thing? Is it anywhere spoken of as good? Is it anywhere given as good? Is it such a gift as a father would give to his children (Matt. vii. 11); or such a gift as a husband would give to a wife (Isa. liv. 5)? Here a holy ingenuity will find ample scope for its exercise; and will find arguments sufficient to overcome the seeming reluctance of the great and liberal Giver. The Syrophenician woman extracted out of words of Christ, which seemed hopelessly to shut the door against her, a promise which the Lord was fain to fulfil.

But even beyond this may the exigences of life or the exercises of the spirit lead us. There are many things which we may desire concerning which, in the nature of things, no definite

promise is given us. You have a child lying sick. It breaks your heart to think of its being taken away from you. In an agony of desire you cry to the Lord to heal him. But you do not know and cannot know the Lord's will; whether he will recover or be taken away. True, indeed, in His compassion and loving kindness He sometimes secretly intimates His will, so that the suppliant rises from his knees, like Hannah, with a countenance no more sad, or with a willingness to surrender him into the hand of the Lord. But these experiences are exceptional; they are not granted to everyone. In this, therefore, you have simply to lay your petition before God, and leave it with Him. You have the assurance that your prayer is heard. You have the assurance that your petition will be granted literally, if in accordance with infinite wisdom and infinite love. You have, moreover, the assurance that if your petition be not literally fulfilled, it is yet fulfilled in some higher and more perfect form. What more could be desired? You would not say, Not Thy will, but mine be done. Dr Calamy, in his *Life and Times*, tells a story which has been often quoted, and may be briefly repeated here by way of illustration. He was called to see an afflicted family in which was a seemingly dying child. When he entered, he heard the father pray-

ing in such unqualified terms for the boy's recovery, that he rebuked him. The father's reply to the rebuke was to the effect that if God did not answer him, he would never pray to Him again. The child recovered. As he grew up, however, he became a wayward and wicked man. He was at length sentenced to death for some crime then capital. His friends were informed that if he confessed and submitted, the last sentence of the law would not be carried out. His father and others laboured to bring him to a sense of his guilt, but in vain. Curses were the only answer they received to their remonstrances. The story is often told under the heading of "An Ossified Heart"; and such surely his heart was. In this state of mind he went down to death, and Dr Calamy adds that he never saw any proof that this terrible judgment exercised any wholesome influence on the family which was so fearfully punished by this long continued calamity. It is needless to add that it would have been many times better if this father had said,—“Not my will, but Thine be done.” And so always, even when in an agony of desire, we cry to the Lord, let us yet submissively say, Thy will be done.

But this is hard to do sometimes. It seems easy enough when the alternative is almost as

pleasing as that which we desire ; but when the alternative is something the thought of which makes us shudder, such as death, dishonour, or ruin, it requires the special grace of the Heavenly Master to fall thus absolutely into the hands of God. Yes, but let us fearlessly, or rather faithfully, do it, and the fall will be so soft that not a bone will be broken. The traveller who fell over the cliff caught in his descent a shrub. The shrub was torn up by the roots by his weight, but it broke his fall and saved his life. This was not all, however ; he found silver clinging to its roots, and thus discovered a silver mine, which made him rich for life.

David had no reason to repent the words he uttered at the beginning of Absalom's rebellion, —“ If I find favour in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and show me both it and His habitation ; but if He thus say, I have no delight in thee ; behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him.” The Lord loves us better than we love ourselves, thinks about us, cares for us, understands us, and never makes any mistakes. When He has already spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, can He deny us anything that is good, or need we fear to fall into His hands. The poor woman who said she would run to Him if He had a drawn sword in His

hand, only expressed in an energetic fashion the fearlessness with which we should abandon ourselves to the will of God.

It will be plain to us, the more we meditate upon it, that the proviso, "according to His will," is no real hindrance to our liberty in prayer. In all things pertaining to our spiritual life, the will of God is an open vision. In all things which perplex us, we may freely pour out our hearts before Him, and express our utmost and inmost desires. Then let us put ourselves absolutely into the hands of Him at whose footstool we bow, and you will know that He hears you, whether the literal petition be fulfilled or not. And familiarity grows. As we abide in Him, and His word abides in us, we learn increasingly what is the will of our Heavenly Father. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant. Let them tell, who dwell in the secret place of the Most High, what intimacy He allows them, and how wondrously He condescends to their petitions. "I am filled with awe," said the missionary Judson just before his death, "when I call to mind that in all my past experience I have never earnestly asked God for any one thing, but sooner or later He gave it to me." Let the reader press on fearlessly and faithfully, taste and see that God is good, and he

will have experiences he will fear to tell before man. And as Jacob becomes Israel, let Israel not only be blest himself, but let him be a fountain of blessing to those around.

XXII

THE PRAYER LIFE OF JESUS

Is it not that we are very apt, as we read the story of Jesus, to think that His life could not be one of such suffering as it seems, seeing He was not only man but God? We are ready to suppose that being God His humanity would in some mysterious way be sustained by His divinity, that His divinity would in some way break the force of those waves of sorrow and suffering which rolled over His head. Apart from His divinity, we can see that His griefs and sorrows must have been intense. He had a tender frame, a pure conscience, a sensitive soul; and He had to walk through a world full of misery and hatred and rebellion against the Father whom He loved. As we think of all these things, we cannot but conclude that His anguish was an ocean which no human plumb-line can fathom. But how does all this anguish consort with His possession of all the attributes of divinity, with His being absolutely God? Did His divinity in the least alleviate, render less terrible, His life of suffering? The answer must be no; for this would rob Christ of His

glory as man's sin-bearer. It would give an air of unreality to much of His life; it would be in truth to deny in a measure His humanity.

The explanation of this difficulty will be found in the prayer-life of Jesus.

In the second chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians, it is said that Christ in coming to this world, though subsisting in the form of God, yet "made Himself of no reputation"; or, better still, "emptied Himself" of His divine perfections and became truly man. He became absolutely "the Servant of Jehovah." He renounced His will. His meat was to do the will of Him that sent Him, and to finish His work. "I can," he says, "of Mine own Self do nothing. I hear, I judge: My judgment is just, because I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me." "I came from heaven," He says again, "not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me." "So I come to do Thy will, O God," is what the Epistle to the Hebrews, quoting the Old Testament, represents Him as saying. And in His great prayer we find Him saying to His Father, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do."

It is in accordance with His thus becoming the Servant, the Sent of the Father, that we find Him ever working, speaking in the name

of the Father, doing only what the Father had given Him to do. "I must work the works of Him that sent Me." And again He says, "The words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself, but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works."

It will be further plain that this relationship between the Father and the Son makes the Son to be absolutely dependent upon the Father. He in Himself was God, possessed all the attributes of God. But to become Man, and to open a door for the outlet of the divine beneficence, He emptied Himself. He gave up as we might say the command of His own position. He left behind Him His power and authority. He signed away for the work He had to do His inherent rights, to be resumed only when His work was finished. Thus at every stage of His earthly pilgrimage He could say, "My Father worketh hitherto and I also work." When His disciples would have persuaded Him not to go up to Bethany because the Jews of late sought to stone Him, His answer was, "Are there not twelve hours in the day, if any man walk in the day he stumbleth not?" As much as to say, "Every step of My journey is marked out for Me. It is in the plan of My life that I should be in Bethany after these two days. The Jews may indeed stone Me, but My place and work are

meantime there and at this time, according to My Father's commandment."

It follows that if Christ thus surrendered everything, He was dependent on His Father for the supply of everything He might need for His work. If one man makes a deed of gift of his whole property to another, on the understanding that the new owner will supply as he needs all his wants, the person who has thus divested himself of his rights will have constantly to look to his friend and draw upon his promised liberality. And accordingly we find that Jesus was a man of prayer. He had daily and hourly to draw upon the Bank above, even His Heavenly Father. This constituted a large part of His communion with God. For every fresh work He had to make fresh application for divine assistance. As man, His task was infinitely beyond the loftiest human power. Can man raise the dead, still the tempest, heal the sick, make the dumb to speak, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk? Could man speak the words of such profound significance that at this day they are mighty to pull down strongholds? Could man alone so penetrate the darkness of the long past that he could tell of Abraham seeing his day? Or could man penetrate so far to the future that he could not only announce the fall of Jerusalem, but even foretell the fact, which is being fulfilled every day before our

eyes, that the incident of the alabaster box of ointment should be spoken of throughout the whole world for a memorial of the generous and loving heart who so honoured her Lord? At every stage of His life we find Him wielding supernatural power—such power as dwells not in ordinary humanity. The supernatural gifts which He exercised must therefore have been sent Him as they were needed from above.

How did He come into the possession of these gifts? How does ordinary humanity come into the possession of God's gifts? How did Peter, for instance, after Jesus had risen, heal Æneas of his palsy, and awaken Dorcas from the sleep of death? How was it that Paul was able to command the cripple at Lystra to stand upright upon his feet, and to announce the punishment of blindness to Elymas the sorcerer? Yea, if it be true "that in us, that is, in our flesh, there dwelleth no good thing," how comes it that God's children possess qualities and exercise gifts which ordinary human nature knows nothing of? They have gone to the stake to die. They have sacrificed home and kindred for the glory of God, and for the spread of His kingdom. They have exercised forgiveness towards their enemies, they have fed the hungry, clothed the naked. They have been angels of mercy on the battlefield; good Samaritans everywhere. All these good works

are supernatural gifts as absolutely as the miraculous gifts of the first disciples. How then do the children of God come to possess these gifts? There can be only one answer—they are given them in answer to their prayers. We do not, indeed, always see them on their knees asking God to bestow upon them this grace and that grace, to help to fulfil the duties laid upon them. It is not their habit to pray to be seen of men. Elijah suddenly appears before Ahab, and makes the startling announcement that there should be neither dew nor rain these years but according to his word. History gives no account of his previous wrestling with God. But we know from James that he prayed earnestly that it might not rain. This announcement of his was a prophecy, an assurance which he had from God in answer to his prayers. And the rule is universal; when man exercises supernatural gifts, when he exhibits a spirit or possesses a character which unsanctified humanity does not possess, we may be assured that, being men of like passions with others, they obtained these gifts as Elijah did, by earnest prayer.

As it is with the servant, so now, we venture to say, it was with the Master, though naturally in a higher degree. Let us read again the story of His life, and we shall find many intimations of this community of habit and character between the Head and the members; and, we may add,

proof of the true humanity of Jesus, and the reality of His human experiences.

Let us begin with the account given us by John of the resurrection of Lazarus. The sisters send word that "he whom Thou lovest is sick." But notwithstanding His love for the household, nay, because of His love for the household, he abides two days still in the same place where He was. Here was the conduct of the wise as well as loving Friend. At last He is face to face with His task. But ere He speaks the word of power, He lifts up His eyes and says, "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always; but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me." Here is Christ's own witness to the source of His power. He proposed to call Lazarus back from the tomb. This was a work far beyond mere human power. Only God can raise the dead. From God therefore the power must come. And how did the Man Christ Jesus obtain the gift? He tells the multitude, He tells us, He obtained it by prayer. He had asked it from His Father; and He left His footstool with the conviction that His prayer was heard; and He consequently now unhesitatingly uses the weapon put into His hands, and speaks the word of power, and "he that was dead came forth."

It is easy to see here that Christ's words are a revelation of His inner life. "Thou hearest Me always," He says. It is His constant habit to seek from His Father by prayer all He needs; and He never seeks in vain. He can calculate with the most absolute certainty on His petitions being granted. And here was a fresh and stupendous illustration. He had asked this power, and, even before He is called upon to exercise it, He thanks His Father for the gift. And He proclaims the fact for the benefit of the onlookers, as well as for the onlookers of all time. Behold the perfect communion of the Son on earth with the Father in heaven, and the beautiful and absolute faith which Christ displays in the ordinance of prayer.

We have another illustration of the prayer-life of Jesus in the miracle of the loaves. "About five thousand men, besides women and children," are to be fed; and the disciples possessed only five loaves and two fishes. Only supernatural power could so multiply the bread and the fishes as to feed such a multitude. Stupendous however as is the task, Jesus has received power to accomplish it. It is said that when by His command the multitude sat down on the grass, "He took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and brake and gave the loaves to the disciples,

and the disciples to the multitude." Here is precisely the same revelation of our Lord's communion with His Father as we have in the raising of Lazarus. What did the lifting up of His eyes to heaven mean? It must mean simply what He said in the hearing of the multitude at the raising of Lazarus: "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me." He had asked the power needful for this stupendous work, and the power was given Him. This is not a mere asking a blessing as we do upon what God gives us. For the glory of God, for a testimony to the Messiahship of Christ, and out of compassion to the multitude, was this great miracle performed. Jesus has asked the power to perform it, His prayer was answered, and God is thanked and praised even beforehand, "because He heareth Him always." Here, then, is another illustration of the prayer-life of Jesus.

Let us look again at another illustration of the prayer-life of Jesus, which is given us on the occasion of His choosing His apostles. What an eventful act this choice must be! They were to be His representatives, His prophets, His forthtellers to all time. By them the world was to be redeemed to God; it was by their instrumentality that the kingdoms of this world were to become the kingdoms of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And it de-

volves on the Lord to make this momentous election. He had at least seventy disciples, and from among these He had to choose twelve. Is it any wonder that Jesus felt the gravity of the crisis, the responsibility of His action. And how does He prepare Himself for the task, how does He obtain the wisdom needed to make an unerring choice. Luke reveals to us the secret. "And it came to pass," he says, "in those days that He went up into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called unto Him His disciples, and of them He chose twelve." There was first the all-night prayer, and then the election of the twelve. Can we fail to recognise the connection between the night of prayer and the morning's choice? Jesus knew how much depended upon this act of His earthly ministry. The fate of the world was involved in it. The great purpose of God, the redemption of the world, depended on it. However unconscious men might be of the tremendous importance of that hour, we may well believe that the heavenly hosts watched with intensity for the decision, and looked with awe upon the men who were called upon to be the founders of God's kingdom on earth. This then was the theme of the Saviour's all-night prayer. He was seeking supernatural wisdom, supernatural insight into the character of His disciples. He was looking

forward to the future vicissitudes of His kingdom, and He wished to be assured that the men He would choose would be fit to face the emergencies of their work. And so intent and anxious was Jesus over His morning's work that not one hour or two hours sufficed for His communion with His Father, but the night long was thus spent. And, doubtless, when the hour of His choice arrived, He would calmly and quietly designate His apostles, well sure that in this as in the other acts of His ministry, the choice He made would be His Father's. "The Son can do nothing of Himself," He tells us, but what He seeth the Father doing; for what things soever He doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner.

Let us look at one more illustration of the prayer life of Jesus. The hour draws nigh when He "must suffer many things." The dark shadow hung over His head with increasing intensity as the inexorable hour drew near. Yet He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem. There was no faltering in His steps. There was a fixed and resolute anticipation of the future before Him. Yet how He shrinks from it. How He shudders at having to bear the burden of the world's guilt. "Now is My soul troubled," he says, "Father save Me from this hour. But for this cause came I unto this hour." This is like the patient upon

whom the surgeon is about to apply his knife, who cries out, "Let me 'alone," and who at the same time wishes the operation to be performed. No wonder, as the scene is rehearsed in Gethsemane, that we find Him saying, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death." No wonder that being in an agony He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Never at any time more than now did He need supernatural help. And, overpowered at the prospect, with strong crying and tears, He offered up prayers and supplications to Him that was able to save Him from death. And His prayer is heard. There is first an angel from heaven strengthening Him. He is able to say, "Not My will but Thine be done." He receives strength to bear the mockeries of the multitude, the revilings of the pretorium, the insults of the soldiery, the perversion of justice, and last of all the sufferings of the Cross. And He passes through all this terrible ordeal without speaking an unsuitable word, or betraying an unholy attitude. Remark the self-restraint betrayed in His words when His disciples would have defended Him in the hour of His capture in His saying, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels. But how then shall the Scriptures be

fulfilled, that thus it must be." Here also note His perfect confidence in His Father as the hearer of prayer. Here He virtually repeats the confession of faith which He made at the tomb of Lazarus, "I know that Thou hearest Me always;" but for that very reason He refuses to ask what would have delivered Him out of the hands of the Jews and Romans, though they had leagued together. Yea, the worst enemies of the human race have never been able to discover a flaw in His demeanour during those prolonged and terrible hours. And how was it possible for the Man Christ Jesus thus to become the willing victim of divine justice? The mystery is here—the prayers of Jesus, His strong crying and tears—this brought Him supernatural strength; He was upheld by the divinity—the altar upon which His human nature was offered up—the divinity whose all-sufficient assistance His prayers ensured.

Was ever prayer so gloriously crowned with success? Did ever prayer accomplish such wonders? Was there ever such an illustration of the words of James? The effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much.

Here, in this theme, is a boundless theme for fruitful meditation, and the nourishment of faith. Taking with us the truth expressed by Christ in the words, "I am not alone, because the Father is with Me," we will read with new eyes

and lively emotions the story of Christ's sojourn on earth. It will be seen and felt how sincere were His tears, how deep were His groans, how heartfelt His joy, how fervent His prayers, and how absolute His faith. It will be seen and felt that His "flesh" was no *semblance*, nor His life a mirage. It was a perfectly human life, and therefore a perfect model for us to copy. Did He, who was the highest type of humanity, more richly endowed, more perfectly created than even the first Adam, yet need continually to live upon God, and shall we, how poor in comparison, be able to live independently of Him? Had He to betake Himself continually to God's footstool, yea to spend nights in prayer, to rise yet a great while before day that He might be strengthened for His tasks, and shall we venture forth even to serve God in our own strength? Did He who knew the Father as no man can know Him have such perfect faith in God as the hearer of prayer, that having asked the gift needful for His task, proceeded immediately to thank His Father for hearing His prayer, and immediately proceeded to use the gift which He believed He had received; and shall we, who know so little of God in comparison, doubt where He never doubted, fear when He never feared? Yes, let us learn of Him who was meek and lowly in heart. Who teacheth like Him? We

cannot err if we walk in His steps. Let us think as He thought, believe as He believed, act as He acted, "Yea, put on Christ Jesus," and we will daily verify our Lord's experience, "I am not alone, but the Father is with Me."

XXIII

THE GATES OF THE DAUGHTER OF ZION

OUR age is frequently characterised as one which eminently inclines to scepticism. Unbelief is said to be in the air. Many have altogether cast off the faith, some hold it doubtfully, and some tremble lest an antichrist should arise who might entirely rob them of their cherished hopes. There is a measure of truth in these representations. Scepticism has always abounded. There never was a time in the history of the Church when it did not abound. The only peculiarity of our time is, that unbelief is somewhat fashionable. It is claimed as a sign of superior enlightenment. Men used to be ashamed of it. Even the elder Mill was wont to intimate to his children and friends that it was not convenient openly to dissent from the commonly received opinions. But now to doubt is the subject of boasting. The faith which we hold may have suited our grandmothers, but the *illuminati* have gone far beyond those days. They know too much to believe as they did. These are the days of enlightenment, and of course they lead the van,

and are able to pour scorn and contempt upon all who do not come up to their standard. Now, if we were dealing with infidelity proper, it would be easy to show that these glib and airy talkers know very little of what they so confidently affirm; that they have merely caught an echo of what they suppose science asserts; and, it being congenial to their tastes, they hastily jump to conclusions adverse to the truth.

The scepticism, again, which invades the Church takes the form of what is called the higher criticism. This school borrows slavishly the vain speculations of Continental theologians, who are professedly unbelievers. By the turn of a sentence or a phrase, they will prove that two men or half-a-dozen men did the work which we have hitherto believed was done by one; and thus we have mistakes and blunders which would be disgraceful in a schoolboy. All this trifling is happily being brushed aside by the robust common-sense which the Anglo-Saxon race possesses. It is alien to our soil, and will not take root by whatever pretentiousness of learning it is advanced. A knowledge of the German language and a good memory¹

¹ After hearing a certain famous preacher for the first time, the stranger remarked to his friend who accompanied him, "That man could not be a heretic if he tried." "What makes you think so?" said the other. "Because," was the answer, "he has evidently a deep sense of sin." Tholuck somewhere bears similar testimony with regard to himself.

are qualifications sufficient to produce any quantity of this pitiful criticism; but they are certainly not sufficient to engraft it into our modes of thought.

We may safely add, that the prospects of scepticism are not improving. The tendency of modern discovery, and even modern science, is to verify revelation. Since the excavations began in the mounds of Konyunjik, Ur of the Chaldees at Tel-el-Maskhûta, and other places in Egypt and Assyria, all the most important facts of the Old Testament history have been certified in a wonderful way. The modern Voltaire dare not repeat his master without bringing down on his head a shower of ridicule on account of his ignorance or credulity. It is not easy now to question even the most perplexing statements of Bible history. An ingenious reasoner may prove, as Archbishop Whately shows, that such a person as Napoleon Buonaparte never existed; but the facts of history make such an attempt ridiculous. And it is equally impossible and absurd to question the facts of revelation, since from the bowels of the earth contemporaneous history has been brought forth which would put all such reasoning to shame.

But while such is the state of the question as regards the present conflict between Christianity and scepticism, there is no doubt that the bold

announcements and confident assertions of modern unbelievers have tended to throw an air of doubt in many minds over the things which we most surely believe. Many rather hope than believe. They are not sure; they try to be sure. If something occurs which inclines them to faith, they come across some statement which lands them where they were. And thus they miss all the strength and comfort which a living faith imparts.

Now we need, shall I say, a *working* religion. A religion which is a speculation, or a per-adventure, or something apart from our everyday life, is worthless to us. It would fail us just at the very time we wanted its help. Life is not a holiday, and therefore a holiday religion is nothing to us. We would thank nobody for it. The great fact and peculiarity of human life is sin; with its invariable consequents, a restless conscience and a life of trouble. The religion which does not provide a remedy for this is plainly false as well as worthless. When God gives, He gives what exactly suits the emergency. If He gives us lungs, He gives us air suitable for filling them; if He gives us our bodily life, He provides that which is necessary to sustain it. And since we need a religion, and a working religion, to give us what would fail to supply the want, would be the father giving his children a stone for bread,

a serpent for a fish. In other words, we need a living God in communion with His people; a living Saviour who will ceaselessly carry on His divine and gracious work.

Now this is what we claim to possess in the faith of God and of Christ. We claim to have in this a religion to live and die with. We claim to possess in our Christian faith everything to make life comfortable and death easy. And we will humbly confess at the same time, that if life be not comfortable and death terrify us, it is not because the divine remedy is insufficient, but because we fail to realise it as we ought.

Strange to say, it is in lands, or among communities where the Bible is best known, where we find most frequently the faith of God and of Christ ignored as a practical force, or an everyday help. It may be something to look at and to admire; something which may some day be useful, as in the hour of death; but with the daily bread of life it has nothing to do. Alas! with multitudes of professing Christians the living verities of the Christian faith have for them no reality. Their life is full of remorse, full of perplexity, full of trouble, and it seldom occurs to them to guess that there is anything provided for them in the religion they profess. They seldom think of turning in that direction for consolation or help. The widow weeps

over her loss, and wonders how she will ever be able to live and provide for her little ones, now that their earthly support is gone. She entirely forgets that God hath promised to be the Father of the fatherless, and the Husband of the widow ; or, if the words are repeated to her, they are very interesting and very sweet, but that is all. If she saw a few friends who would promise her help, that would be more substantial consolation. The man of business spends his days in care, and his nights in sleeplessness, and wonders if life will ever become easier to him ; and though he may hear the words, "casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you," they do not strike him as offering any real help to bear his burdens. The slave of sin will in like manner weep in secret over his helplessness to resist temptation, and fight a losing battle with temptation and sin ; and though it may have been often dinned into his ears that Christ is the Saviour of sinners, it somehow never occurs to him that here he would find all the assistance he requires. There are in like manner burdened consciences which force the deepest groans in secret from those who carry them ; but they cannot believe that there is any remedy for remorse, or any balm for such wounds as theirs. And thus onward might we run through the whole catalogue of human sorrows, and we would find professing

Christian men and women suffering from them, utterly ignorant of the fact that, in the Christianity they profess is medicine sufficient to ease their aches and to relieve their pains. We exclaim with astonishment as we come upon spectacles so sad, "Is there no balm in Gilead, is there no physician there?"

It is this unbelief which we have to overcome in men. We may discomfit the assailant of the faith by arguments and evidences stronger than he can answer, but we do not thereby gain a living faith in a living God. We may, on the other hand, be assailed by the most subtle arguments which infidelity can produce, but if we have a living practical faith in the living God we will not be in the least moved from our confidence. For then we know in the highest sense. We have the testimony of consciousness, of experience, of fact. If I have asked anything of God, and He has given it me, nobody will convince me that God does not hear prayer. If the same experience has been repeated a thousand times, I can no more doubt that God hears prayer than I can doubt that the sun shines. And so in all the ramifications of Christian experience; they are only the fulfilments of external revelation.

Now, when the schoolboy tries the ice and finds it bear, he invites his companions to the same pleasure as he himself enjoys, assuring

them from his experience that they may safely entrust themselves to the glassy surface. This, then, is our business if we have proved for ourselves that God is true. We should live and move among men as witnesses for God and His truth. We should be ready to say when we come upon the despondent, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." This is one of the ends God had in view when He delivered out of an horrible pit and miry clay, "that many might see it, and fear, and trust in the Lord." This was the task which the Lord prescribed to the man whom He found among the tombs: "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion upon thee." And what other ends could be served by his testimony, except that God would be glorified and other despairing souls might be encouraged to apply confidently to the same great Physician? David, David's Lord, in the twenty-second Psalm teaches the same lesson when he says, "I will declare Thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee. . . . For He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; but when he cried unto Him, He heard." And as the result of this personal testimony, "The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the Lord that

seek Him." Even "one generation shall praise His works to another, and shall declare His mighty acts." So were fathers "not to hide from their children His wonderful works which He hath done, that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but might keep His commandments."

All of us will confess how helpful it is to our weak faith when he, who has been lifted up from the gates of death, shows forth God's praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion. Here is a work for all living, believing Christians. God gives us experiences of His faithfulness for this very purpose, as the apostle testifies: "Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." This is the object we have had in view in writing these papers. We have sought to encourage faith in God and faith in His word. We have sought to testify to a living God, and to His faithfulness to those that trust in Him. We must not forget that faith is the gift of God, and like all other gifts, it is to be sought from Him. But He gives in the use of means. He gives us faith as we read His word; He gives us faith or helps our faith by the testimony of others; and He increases our faith by our experiences of His faithfulness. Then this is a

treasure which we must endeavour to communicate to others. There is many "a forlorn and shipwrecked brother" who needs just such encouragement to enable him "to take heart again." Here is a most inviting and promising field of usefulness. We will meet with opportunities everywhere; and he who embraces them will often have as his reward "the blessing of him that was ready to perish."

XXIV

CONCLUSION

WE propose, in this our last chapter, to add a few disconnected thoughts on some points which may have been omitted, or only alluded to in previous papers. It is still our aim to offer encouragements to prayer, and we begin by noting that one of the discouragements of prayer is the absence of any felt ability to pray. Our prayers are so disjointed, our thoughts so wandering, our souls so cold, that after the endeavour to pray we are ready to say, better not pray at all than pray in such a fashion. Certainly this state of things is not to be excused. We *ought* to pray more reverently, more fervently, more believingly. For this state of mind we are responsible, and it is because we have failed somewhere that this has come upon us. Yet here, the rule is golden. If *you cannot pray as you ought, then pray as you can*. Nothing is to be gained by sitting down in despair. We have no right to expect any miraculous assistance. This condition has not come miraculously, and it will not depart miraculously. Be up and doing, then. Prayer is a duty as well as a pri-

vilege, and if you cannot do your duty as you ought, then do it as you can. If we wait till we reach a perfect ideal, we will sit and do nothing all our days.

It was this state of mind which prompted the disciples to approach their Master with the petition, "Lord, teach us to pray." They had heard Him pray; and this showed them how poor, imperfect, halting and sinful their own prayers were. Feeling their helplessness, they applied to the Great Teacher for instruction and help. And He gave them what they asked. He outlined the Scripture promises in the Lord's Prayer; He summed up Scripture encouragements to prayer in the parable of the friend at midnight, and in words of promise; then He indicated the source of the spirit of prayer, even the Holy Spirit given to all that ask. And if we would learn this Divine art, we too must become pupils of the Great Teacher, and accept His guidance. When, then, we ask Him to teach us, we find He sends us, in the first place, to the Scriptures. There we find the matter of prayer. The Word of God is the foundation of our faith, and it is here only where we can learn to *know* God's name, and thus to put our trust in Him. Again, when the Lord speaks this parable, He not only sends us to the Scripture, but He teaches us to meditate upon it. Our souls are naturally at zero; meditation upon the

Scripture adds fuel to the flame, and stirs up the dying embers, and the coldness departs. Those who are familiar with George Müller's narrative will remember how he tells the story of his making this discovery. At first when he began his Christian life, his first business ever was to fall on his knees. But he was led to a more excellent way. He learnt that, in order to pray well, it is necessary, in the first place, to meditate on some portion of Scripture, and only after he had done this was he able to pray ; and this became his constant habit. Yet farther, our Lord, by speaking of the Holy Spirit, by promising Him to all that asked Him, reminds us that He is the Spirit of grace and supplication, that without Him it is impossible to pray, and therefore, in order to pray, we must seek Him.

Here, then, let the suppliant who mourns over the feebleness of his prayers become a disciple of Christ, and let him say—"Lord, teach us to pray," as he reads and meditates upon this chapter in Luke.

Whence come our disappointments in prayer? That you have met with, or now meet with disappointments, we take for granted. Not always has your success been according to your expectations. The experience of some in this direction has been very painful. Now they that put their trust in Him cannot be put to shame, and yet you seem to be. The truth is here, you

have disappointed yourself; the disappointment has not been on God's part. We find Jeremiah complaining—"Wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail"? (Jer. xv. 18). God had promised him at the outset of his ministry that while they should fight against him, they should not prevail against him, "for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee" (Jer. i. 19). And now it seems as if God's promise had failed. But he was mistaken. It was his faith that had failed. In the midst of the conflict, he saw nothing before him but disaster and defeat; but God's time had not come, the end was not yet; he was yet to find that God was with him, to save and to deliver. Elijah, in like manner, makes the same complaint when he requested for himself that he might die. All his hopes were blighted, and seemingly God Himself had lifted him up to the height of his expectation, only to cast him down again. But here again he had disappointed himself. He had expected that events would proceed in a particular path, and when they ran in the contrary direction, he was disappointed in God, as if God had promised that his wishes would be fulfilled in the manner he had imagined.

And so it will often be with us if we prescribe to God, or conclude that our experience must exactly correspond with that of some one else,

God does promise the gift, but He keeps in His own hand the time and the way. We cannot guess beforehand the how or the when. In all probability the deliverance will come at some unexpected moment, and in some undreamt-of way. Here we may repeat the proverb—"It is the unexpected that happens." He is the Lord of Hosts; His resources are infinite. The raven may carry food to His servant; and the wrath of man will praise Him. And if we would avoid those painful shocks such as these disappointments bring, we must be content to leave our petitions in His hand, and not prescribe to Him how they ought to be fulfilled.

We will often, in like manner, be disappointed if we expect to repeat exactly other men's experiences. All men's experiences are similar, yet not the same. Such are the resources of the Creator, that not two countenances are alike. And the same may be said of human experiences. They are infinitely varied. Hence, while we are mightily encouraged by other men's testimonies to God's faithfulness, we must yet leave God to manifest His faithfulness to us in his own way.

The *waiting* time is often a perplexing time. What shall we do in the interval between the asking and the receiving? Perhaps the inclination is to sit down, and lay all other

occupations aside until this particular help be granted, or this particular obstacle be removed. But this is not waiting—we wait in the way of duty, and it is often in the way of duty that the answer comes. As a good illustration, it is told of John Wesley that he was once in a packet with some of his preachers, among the Channel Islands, on his way to the mainland. He was busily occupied in reading. Information was brought him that the wind was contrary, and there was no prospect of their reaching the shore in time to fulfil their engagements. Wesley laid aside his book, and gave himself to prayer for a favourable wind. Having done this, he resumed his studies as before. Very soon the propitious gale made its appearance. This is true and faithful waiting. It is not true waiting either to sit down and do nothing till the answer come, neither is it true waiting to run hither and thither seeking to force Providence. The right attitude is that of the Psalmist—"Truly my soul waiteth upon God, from Him cometh my salvation." "My soul is silent before God," is a more literal rendering. Let the soul wait in silence the unfolding of God's purpose. "Bear and forbear," says Luther.

"Bear and forbear, and silent be,
Tell to no man thy misery ;
Yield not in trouble to dismay,
God can deliver any day."

It cannot be too often repeated that our expectations in prayer are based upon the promises. The substance of our prayers thus becomes—"Do as Thou hast said." But here sometimes the suppliant anxiously asks the question—May I claim this promise, and ask for its fulfilment in my own experience? It is true, in the first place, that all the promises are the common property of all the saints. They equally belong to one as well as to another. But, then, some promises are more suitable to our condition than others. We venture therefore to say that the rule is—claim the promise or promises that suit you. You want some particular thing, and you are not sure which shop deals in that article which you require. You go to the shop window, and you look among the things exposed, and if you find the very article which you want, you instantly go inside and are supplied. So, in like manner, we find ourselves oppressed with particular wants. We go to the Scriptures and search, and see whether God has promised to this want a corresponding supply. If, then, we discover the suitable promise, that promise is ours. Let us suppose you find yourself in your household, or in your business, making continual mistakes. You discover you lack wisdom. You search the Scriptures, and you find the promise—"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God,

who giveth unto all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." That promise is so manifestly suited to your need, that you are entitled to claim it, and to ask God to make it good to you. For whom could it have been written but for such as you confess yourself to be? Again, let us suppose you are in danger of suffering at the hands of envy, and the tongue of envy moves towards your injury. Search the Scriptures and you will find it written—"No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise in judgment against thee shall be condemned." For whom can this promise have been written but just for one placed in your circumstances? And the promise of daily bread belongs to him who is in danger of want; of deliverance from trouble to him who is in trouble, and thus onward. In the storehouse of God there is a supply for every want, every supply has its promise, or promises, and these belong specially to those who need them. Find the word suitable to your case, and when you find it corresponds exactly, appropriate it with your whole soul, and in the name of Christ claim its fulfilment.

We would have been glad to have had the opportunity of urging *united* prayer. The promise here is: "If two of you shall agree as touching anything that they shall ask, it

shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven." It is implied in this that while one suppliant prevails with God, two or more will have greater and speedier success. There are reasons for this. Two or more are not so likely to mistake the will of God as one; and just as the strength and importunity of one moves God, the strength and importunity of two or more will move Him much more. It is enough for us, however, that we have the promise, and it is ours to take advantage of it. When we are able in any cause to associate with ourselves one or more "like-minded," how our "mutual faith" is cheered and strengthened, and in difficult cases our hopes are kept alive. In the palmy days of Baxter in Kidderminster, we learn that it was the custom for groups of praying people to unite together, and by ceaseless prayer to win great things from God. On one occasion when they proposed to pray for an insane member of the flock, Baxter himself discouraged them, deeming the case hopeless, and fearing the effect of prayer seemingly in vain upon the godless. They persevered, however, in spite of his remonstrances, and their faith was rewarded by the recovery of the patient.

One hint more. It is an advice which Müller of Bristol gives to those who are setting out on their prayer-life, to keep a note-book, to insert

in it their special prayers, to note the dates when they began, and then to note the day when the answer came. We can cordially endorse this advice. How encouraging in the day of trial to recall those past experiences of God's faithfulness. Each sweet Ebenezer, as Newton's hymn tells us, confirms us in the assurance that He will help us to the end. What an interesting record would this prove of the hidden life! "The God which fed me all my life long unto this day," said the dying Jacob. And as he testified so may we testify sometimes to generations yet unborn. Thus, for instance, does Mrs Veitch, in the interesting memoir in which she records her many trials, testify even to this day to the faithfulness of Jehovah. And not only should we be able to testify to ourselves and others, but it would ensure our engaging in the work of prayer as a real business from which we expected substantial results.

In bidding the reader farewell, we humbly beseech God to give him or her the Spirit of grace and supplication so abundantly that, after reading these papers, he or she will be able to say, like the Queen of Sheba, concerning this great theme, "The half was not told me."

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